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THE
SEVEN CHURCHES





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CHRIST & THE SEVEN CHURCHES:

OR,

REMARKS ON THE FIRST THREE CHAPTERS

OF THE

BOOK OF REVELATION.

By WM. KELLY.



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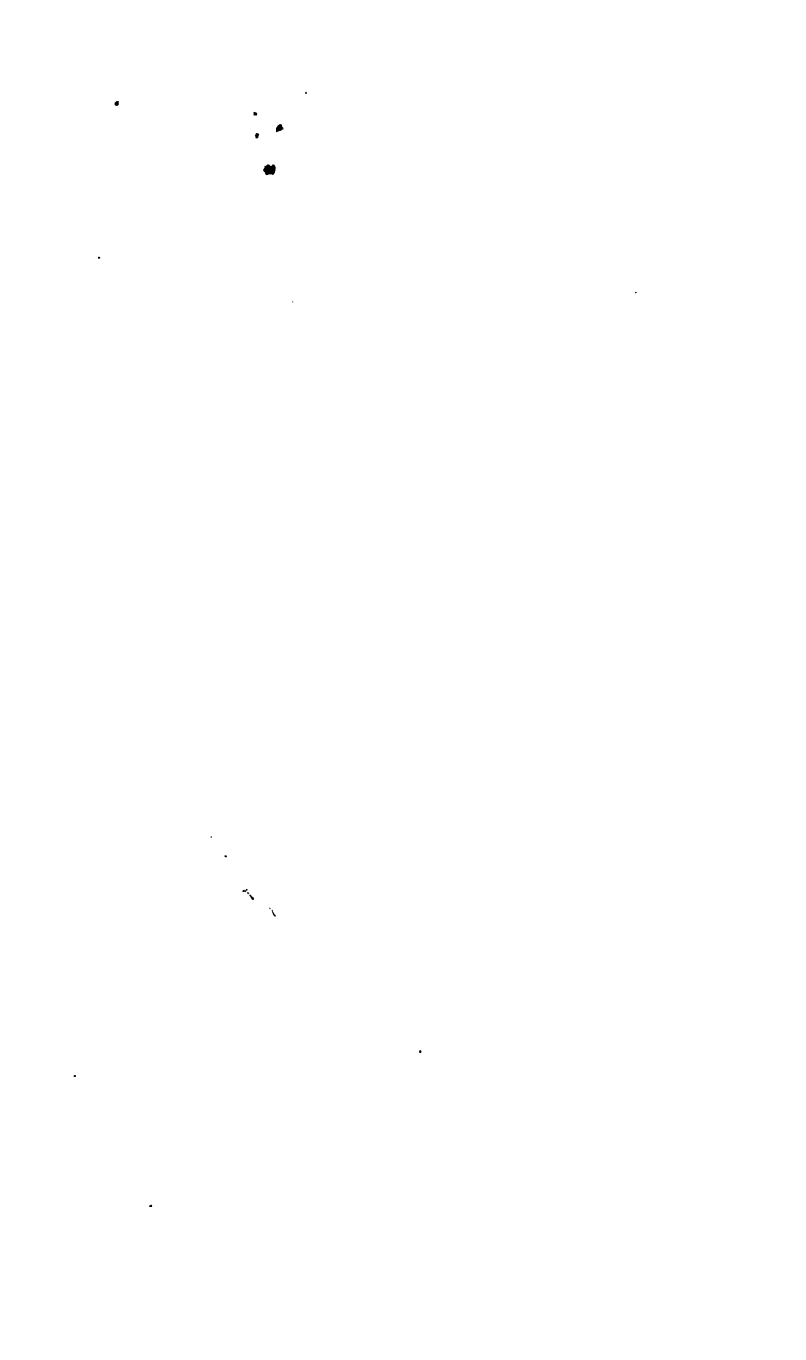
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LECTURES ON THE BOOK OF REVELATION.

CHAPTER I.

EVERY Christian of spiritual intelligence must have felt more or less fully the peculiar character of the book on the study of which we now enter. "The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto him." It is evident that the Lord Jesus is viewed here, not in His place of intimacy as the only-begotten Son in the bosom of the Father, but in one of comparative distance. It is His revelation, but, moreover, the revelation which *God gave* Him. Somewhat similar is that remarkable expression which has perplexed so many in the gospel of Mark (chap. xiii. 32), "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man: no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." He is the servant Son of God all through that gospel; and it is the perfection of a servant not to know what his lord doeth—to know, if we may so say, only what he is told. Here, Christ receives a revelation from God; for, however exalted, it is the position He took as man which comes out conspicuously in the Revelation. And what makes this the more striking is that, of all the inspired writers of the New Testament, none dwells with such fulness upon His supreme and divine glory as John in his gospel. In the Revelation, on the contrary, it is the

very same John who brings out with the greatest detail His human glory.

In keeping with this, the Revelation is "to shew unto his *servants* things which must shortly come to pass." How very different is the tone of John xv. 15, "Henceforth I call you not servants;" and also of John xvi. speaking of the Spirit, "He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine and shall shew it unto you. *All things that the Father hath are mine;* therefore said I that he shall take of mine and shall shew it unto you." So we see through the gospel from first to last, that the design of the Spirit is to give the disciples the title and consciousness of their sonship with and through Jesus, the Son of God in the highest sense. Thus in chap. i. 11, 12, "He came unto his own, and his own [people] received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." And again, after His death and resurrection, the Lord says, chap. xx. 17, "Go to my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father; and to my God and your God." Of course they were servants also, and there is not a shade of incongruity. Still, the difference of the relationships is immense; and the Revelation clearly is addressed to the lower of these relations. The reason, I presume, is, partly because God is therein making known a certain course of earthly events with which the lower position is most in harmony (the higher one of sons being more suitable to communion with the Father and with His Son); and partly because God seems here to prepare the way for dealing with His people in the latter day, when their position

as His *servants* will be more or less manifested, but not the enjoyment of nearness as *sons*—I allude to the interval after the removal of the Church.

The next words greatly confirm this; for the Lord “sent and signified [it] *by His angel* unto His servant John.” That is, the prophetic communication is made, not directly, but through the intervention of an angel; and John is no longer spoken of as “the disciple whom Jesus loved, which also leaned upon his breast at supper,” but as “his servant,” “who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, [and] of all things that he saw.” It has to be remarked here, that the last “and” ought to disappear, which makes no small difference in the sense. For “all things that he saw” must not be regarded as a third and additional division, but rather as explaining or limiting the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. The visions of John constituted the word and testimony spoken of, and thus the true rendering is, “Who bare record of (or testified) the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ—whatsoever things he saw.” Compare chap. xxii. 8.

Very different, again, is the revelation of God here and the testimony which Jesus bears in this book, from what we find in John’s gospel. The Word of God there is the Lord Jesus Himself, who in the beginning was with God and was God; the full and personal expression of God, and that not merely as the Creator of all things, but in perfect grace. “In him was life, and the life was the light of men.” “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, (the glory as of the only-

begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." In the Revelation, on the contrary, even when He is spoken of as the Word of God, it is as the expression of divine judgment, because the whole book is eminently judicial. "He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood; and his name is called the Word of God" (Rev. xix. 13). So too, in the gospel, the testimony that Jesus renders is to the Father, as it is throughout the Father's joy to bear witness of the Son. Indeed, the Son Himself, towards the close of His ministry, sums up the pith and character of the testimony there in these few words, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John xiv. 9).

All this makes the distinctive features of the Revelation to stand out in broader contrast. For throughout the book the very name of the Father occurs but rarely, and even where it does, the object is in no way the revelation of His love as Father to His family. In Rev. i. 1, iii. 21, and xiv. 6, He is spoken of as such in relation to Jesus only. The grand subject is, God manifested in His judgments here below, with a view to the manifestation of the Lord Jesus, "King of kings and Lord of lords." Even when the churches are in question, it is given about them to another, not to themselves directly.

"Blessed [is] he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time [is] at hand." What a serious mistake in the face of such words as these for Christians to think that this book or any part of it is unprofitable, and that it may be safely

set aside either as too difficult to understand, or, if understood, as having no practical bearing upon the soul! It is remarkable indeed with what special care the Lord has commended it, not only here at the commencement, but at the close, where we read, "These sayings [are] faithful and true, and the Lord God of the spirits of the prophets sent his angel to show his servants the things which must shortly come to pass. Behold I come quickly; blessed [is] he which keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book." It would seem that the Lord's prescient eye anticipated in such warnings the neglect with which the Apocalypse would be treated by His servants, and that He was thus solemnly guarding them against it by commending the book emphatically to their study and use. It is a little remarkable, by the way, that a somewhat similar admonition occurs in the close of 1 Thessalonians, which was the first of Paul's epistles, and the one which above all others developes the grand truth of the coming of the Lord. In Rev. i. 3, the Lord takes pains to encourage every possible class of people who might come in contact with the book. Not only the individual who reads is pronounced blessed, but those who *hear* its words and keep (or observe) what is written therein. And certain I am that the Lord does not fail to encourage His saints who count on His assured faithfulness and blessing. He has never turned aside from using it for good, and especially in times of danger, spite of all contempt or perversion.

The objection to the study of prophecy arises from a root of unbelief, sometimes deeply hidden, which

supposes all blessing to depend on the measure in which a subject bears immediately on one's self or one's circumstances. Thus when some cry out, That is not *essential*, I would ask, *Essential to what?* If they mean essential to salvation, we agree. But then on what a ground do such objectors stand! The anxiety to examine only what they deem indispensable to salvation shows that they have no consciousness of salvation themselves, and that this need of their souls is the only thing they are alive to. Now all hold that not prophecy but the gospel should be put before the unconverted. The coming of Christ in glory, which is the centre of unfulfilled prophecy, ought to be terror to their hearts, instead of a mere question for interesting discussion. To the believer, indeed, His coming is "that blessed hope." We wait for the Son of God from heaven, and we await Him not only without anxiety but with joy, because we know Him to be "Jesus which delivered us from the wrath to come." But for any man, who has not peace by faith in Him dead and risen, to occupy his mind either with this, the Church's hope, or with the events of which prophecy treats, is but a diversion of which the enemy can make fearful use, if it be not a proof of utter deadness of conscience as to his own condition before God,—though I am far from saying, that God may not make use of that truth to arouse it. On the other hand, prophecy is essential to our due appreciation of Christ's glory and of the glory that is to be revealed. To slight prophecy, therefore, is to despise unwittingly that glory and the grace which has made it known to us. It is the plainest evidence of the

selfishness of our hearts, which wants every word of God to be directly about ourselves.

God takes for granted that His children love to hear whatever will exalt the Lord Jesus Christ. The result, too, is striking and serious: where Christ is the object of our hearts, all is peace; where our own happiness is the first thought, there is disappointment and uncertainty.

Another form in which this egotism meets us, and must be watched against, among those who do hear the words of this prophecy, is the assumption that its visions are about the Church—that the seals, trumpets, and vials, for instance, are of chief value and interest, because they concern ourselves (i. e. the Church) either in the past or in the future. But this is a fundamental mistake, as we may gather even from the words of the verse before us. The divine ground alleged for the importance of taking heed to this book lies not in the time being come, or our being in the circumstances described, but in their being *near*; “for the time is at hand.” If it could profit the saints of God in the apostle’s days, who were not personally concerned in the judgments, equally at least may it avail for us. The Lord grant that we may increasingly value the place in which He has set us, peacefully “knowing these things before.”

Ver. 4—6. “John to the seven churches which are in Asia.”* Even the three verses already looked at

* By Asia is meant not even Asia Minor, but that part of its western coast which constituted the Roman proconsular province. The kingdom of Pergamus had that title given to it, just as ~~part~~

give us a certain measure of insight into the peculiar features of this book, which are obviously distinct from the other parts of the New Testament. God reverts a great deal to the principles on which He had acted in Old Testament times. One can see that the positive edification of the Church is not the subject, nor the unfolding of God's special dealings in mercy. But we have judgment of evil, whether in the churches or in the world. In perfect harmony with this we have God introducing Himself to His people by a different style and title. "Grace unto you and peace from him which is, and which was, and which is to come." It is generally what answers in the New Testament to Jehovah in the Old. There is this peculiarity, that He is here revealed as first He *that* is, then He *that* was, and He *that* is to come. The "I am" takes precedence, but He was before, and is the coming One. God of old revealed Himself to Israel as the unchangeable One, "the same yesterday, to-day and for ever." But now God speaks in the language of the Gentiles, and, by these words—"Him which is, and which was, and which is to come," translates as

of the Carthaginian territory was called the province of Libya or Africa.—Some account for the absence of allusion to Colosse and Hierapolis by the circumstance that they were destroyed by an earthquake soon after St. Paul's epistle to the former. If Eusebius and Tacitus refer to the same fact (for their dates differ), it seems that Laodicea, though involved in the catastrophe, was rebuilt before the reign of Domitian. But adopting the earlier date of the Roman historian (A.D. 61), how can this consist with the usual reference of the Colossian epistle to A.D. 64?—May I also express my surprise that the strange notion of Theodoret, that St. Paul founded the churches of Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis, should be held by any unbiassed person? I am aware of Lardner's elaborate effort. But Col. ii., if rightly understood, includes the Colossians and Laodiceans among those who had not seen the apostle in the flesh.

it were that name of Jehovah, never before so communicated to them. He is going to return to His ancient people Israel; but before He does so, there must necessarily be a sweeping judgment upon the professing mass that calls itself by the name of the Church. But when God has set Christendom aside, He will bring in Israel again—no longer on the ground of law, but of grace. The law executed death on sinful man, but the grace of God executed it on the person of the Son of God. In Heb. ii. 9 we have it said “that He, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man.” As God, in the death of the Lord Jesus, has given a stronger expression of His hatred of sin than in any other dealing, so in proportion, and as an answer to His death, does grace now flow out to the very worst. In that day Israel will know this for themselves.

The style in which the Holy Ghost is here introduced is as strikingly characteristic of the book as the way in which the Lord Jesus Himself was spoken of. “Grace [be] unto you and peace . . . from the seven Spirits which are before his throne.” Of course, the same Holy Ghost, known as the “*One Spirit*” in other parts of God’s word, is here mentioned as “the seven Spirits which are before His throne.” He is spoken of as the “*One Spirit*,” where it is a question of the one body, the Church, as in Eph. iv. 4. But here it is the “seven Spirits;” because, when God has finished His present work in the Church, He will infallibly cut off the faithless Gentile, and will no longer gather Jews and Gentiles into one body on the earth. On the contrary, Israel is to be put above

the Gentiles. It will be a different state of things altogether; and the Holy Ghost, therefore, is regarded in His various fulness of operations (as He is in connexion with Messiah in Isaiah xi.), and not in His *heavenly* unity. It is added, "which are before his throne," because the main subject of this book is the government of God; first, providentially and preparatorily in the seals, trumpets, and vials; next, personally at Christ's appearing till the kingdom be given up and that be all in all.

In general, when we have "grace be unto you and peace," it is "from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ." But in this place the order is different. First, it is "from him which is, which was, and which is to come," i.e., from Jehovah; then, "from the seven Spirits," &c.; and, lastly, "from Jesus Christ," &c. I think this departure from the usual order is because Jesus is here spoken of, not so much as our Lord, neither in His divine glory as Son of God, but in special reference to the earth and His rightful claims over the world. He is "the faithful witness." All other witnesses had been unfaithful. He alone had been the faithful witness for God on this earth. But, besides this, He was "the first-begotten of the dead" the first person who had entered into resurrection life in that wonderful way, so that corruption can never touch it. "Being raised from the dead, he dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him." Moreover, He is "the prince of the kings of the earth." Yet all these things are connected with what He was, is, and will be *as man*. It is Jesus viewed in His earthly connexions. His inter-

mediate relation to the Church (as its Head, and as the great High-priest) disappears, as not falling in with the design.

But mark the beauty of what follows. The moment Jesus is presented to the Church, and is announced as "the faithful witness, the first-begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth," she can contain herself no longer. The saints interrupt, if we may so say, the message of John, and break forth into a song of praise—"Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father." He satisfies the affections by His love, He has cleared the conscience by His blood, and has put us in such glorious relationships as He stands in Himself to His God and Father.

There is a little alteration that should be made in this verse, which, to my mind, greatly adds to the sweetness of it. In the correct text it is "Unto him that loveth us," not "that loved us." It is quite true that "Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it." Eph. v. shows us this;—equally true this He "loved me and gave himself for me," as in Gal. ii. But the first of Revelation shows us the present love of Jesus. It is not that He is always washing us from our sins: He has washed us with His own blood once for all, and does not require so to wash us again. There is, however, the practical cleansing day by day—the washing of water by the word; but this is not what is spoken of here, but in His blood a finished work, and one that lasts all through to His praise. But how blessed it is to know, while this is the very book that unfolds to us the ways and means by which God was about to put

aside His unfaithful people, and to judge the evil of the world,—that in the midst of all this, we can look up in the full confidence of His present abiding love, and say—“Unto him that loveth us, and washed us from our sins in his blood, to him be glory and dominion unto the ages of the ages. Amen.”

Verse 7. After the salutation, “Grace be to you and peace,” &c., we had an interruption. It was the voice of the heavenly saints breaking forth into a strain of praise. Now we have (ver. 7) those solemn but blessed words, “Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.” This is not a part of the song, but a testimony quite distinct from it. And we often find these two things: that which forms the communion of a saint of God, and also that which is or should be his testimony.

The communion of each other is a happy thing; but it is the presentation of Christ and the knowledge of our portion in Him which calls out worship. Besides this, the believer is acquainted by God with what is coming upon the world. And this is a part of our testimony, but not the theme with which the heart should be most filled. With a person who merely dwells upon prophecy, you will never find much fellowship. It would be very wrong to despise prophecy, and he who does will be sure to fall into some snare or other. But if the Christian is always occupied with the details of prophecy, there never will be power for heavenly worship; nor does it necessarily deliver a man from the

ways of the world. A person may be able to talk well enough about the Jews, about the judgments on the beast, &c., and yet may go on walking with the world. But when the heart is occupied with Christ, and these things come in as a sort of background, then we shall find that the Holy Spirit will show us "things to come." So, in 2 Peter i. 19, it is said, speaking of the word of prophecy, "Whereunto ye do dwell that ye take heed." It is important that I should see what is coming, and that I should not indulge myself in an easy path here below. To know that the Lord is coming to judge the habitable world, ought never to be a comfort to those who are swimming with its current. But there is something else that should be the delight of the soul. When does the day-light dawn and the day-star arise in our hearts? Peter does not here speak of the day coming on the world, but affirms that the word of prophecy is an admirable lamp until you get heavenly light, and the day-star arises in your heart—the hope of the coming of the Lord Jesus as the Church's proper portion. This is never presented in scripture as a bare prophetic event. Christ waited for and known as One who may come at any time to gather us together to Himself—such is the form taken by our blessed hope. It is the apostle Paul who specially brings out the hope of the Church. John, too, looks at Christ as the Bridegroom—at what He is for the heart.

When the Lord comes to receive us, He is not said to come "with the clouds." When He ascended, a cloud received Him. Even so will it be with us: we shall be caught up together in clouds to meet Him.

But here He is manifested for judgment of the world, and especially of the Jews. "Behold, he cometh with the clouds." This is a revelation known and testified by the heavenly saints, but not their own joy in communion. "Even so, Amen."

In Colossians we have the association of the saints with Christ very fully brought out (Chaps. ii. iii.) He is my life, and I am one with Him. Thus, when I find Christ my Saviour is dead to the world, in Him I become dead to the world also. I find not only my treasure there, but the very religion of the world judged, because Christ was cast out by the world's religion. When He comes with the clouds, every eye shall see Him. But this will not be the case when He comes to fetch His Church. God is gathering the friends of Christ round the name of Christ now. The Church is a body that is called while Christ is not seen, and the Christian, having his portion in Him now, is hidden with Him. "Your life is hid with Christ in God."

In this verse, then, it is not the Lord coming to meet His own and gather them to Himself in the air; but "every eye shall see him . . . and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." When the Lord comes to take the Church, it will be far otherwise. God has joined us to the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven, according to all the efficacy of His death and resurrection. As far as the spirit is concerned, this is true now, and it will be true of the body itself when Christ comes. The resurrection of Christ calls me to live thoroughly to God, as the death of Christ makes me as truly dead in principle to the world as if I were

already buried. In practice alas! we have to own sad falling short. Still, says the apostle, "your life is hid," &c. It is the life of Christ you have received. As long as Christ is hidden, you are hidden also. But the time is coming when this will no longer be the case. "When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." When Christ comes to receive the Church, no eye will see Him but those for whom Christ comes. When the world sees Christ, it will be when He comes in glory, bringing His saints with Him—revealed from heaven with the angels of His power, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God (the Gentiles), and on them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (the Jews.) If the world were to see Christ coming alone in glory before the Church is caught up to Him, it would not be true that "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." The world can never see Christ coming to receive the saints, because then they must have seen Him without them and before them; whereas the same moment of His appearing is to be the epoch of our appearing with Him. And this does not merely rest upon a word: it is the doctrine of the whole passage. And the same truth is shown and confirmed by other proofs throughout the New Testament.

In Christ's death we are dead to the world; in His resurrection we are risen, and are therefore to have our hearts set upon heavenly things before we see them. And more than that. Christ is not always to be hidden: He is about to be manifested, and when He is, we, too, shall be manifested along with Him.

It is plain that Christ and the Church must have been together before they are manifested to the world, if they are to appear together. In Rev. xix. 11 we have this taught beyond all doubt. "I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse, and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True," &c. "And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean." The horse is an emblem of power, the white horse of prosperous or victorious power. It is the Lord Jesus coming in judgment, which will be the time when He comes in the clouds of heaven. These armies that are seen following Him out of heaven, clothed in fine linen, are not angels. The text says that the fine linen (*βύσσινον*) is the righteousness of saints. And the remarkable thing is that, although angels are described in chap. xv. as being "clothed in pure and white linen," a different word (*λίνον*) is used. It is the heavenly saints who are described in chapter xix. as the armies of heaven, &c. They were in heaven, therefore, before the way was opened for Christ to come out in judgment; and they follow Him from heaven when He comes. I doubt not that angels are in His train also, as appears from other texts; but they do not seem spoken of here.

There are thus two important and different stages of the Lord's second coming. First of all, He will come to receive His people to Himself, and the Church ought always to be waiting for this. In the next place, He will come to judge the world, when He has already taken up the heavenly saints, and wickedness rises to its head apace. Then, suddenly, the heavens

will open, and Christ the Lord Jesus will come and the Church with Him, appearing together in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Is it asked *how*? Israel was not told how they were to be delivered out of Egypt. The Lord *was* going to deliver them; but He did not explain it before it came to pass. And the Lord is going to bring the Church to heaven by His coming. Besides this, He will judge the wickedness of the world, and then the Church will come with Him.

Verse 8. Here, it seems to me, that we have God, as such, rather than the Lord Jesus,* uttering the titles of His various glory, as a sort of seal of the foregoing and an introductory basis for what follows, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God that is, and that was, and that is to come, the Almighty." The first is evidently a name most suited to the book which so admirably closes the written communications of God. This, and all the rest of His characters here announced, would be deeply necessary for the saints to remember, whether for us before the trial, or for those who shall be called on to pass through it.

Verse 9 is not quite correctly given. "I, John, who also am your brother and companion in tribula-

* At the close of the book (ch. xxii. 12) the Lord takes similar titles; for if He were the exalted man and is to come and to judge as such, He was much more, and no designation of the Eternal God could exceed the dignity of His person. But the words of the common text in verse 11 ("I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last and") are an interpolation *there*, and mar the symmetry of the context. All the best mss., versions, &c. reject them, and require "God" in verse 8.

tion." The word "also" is left out in the best copies. And what follows should be read thus: "your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience in Christ." They all went together. He purposely speaks of himself, not as a member of the body of Christ, but as their brother and companion in tribulation (perhaps because, after the Church is taken away, there will still be saints on earth and our brethren). John puts himself along with them. The Holy Ghost loves us, whatever specialities of privilege may come in, as much as possible to take our place along with the saints of God at all times. The book of Revelation was written for the Church, just when it was drifting into a state of ruin. In chap. vi. we have some of these companions in tribulation. But what they say proves that they do not belong to the Church. "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood . . . ?" We find a proper Christian appeal to God in the case of Stephen—"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." The Christian is always called to suffer in the world. These Apocalyptic saints will understand that the Lord is about to judge, and they will ask Him to do so. It would be wrong *now* to ask this, for it is the day of grace still. Faith habitually takes its language from what God is doing, and God is dealing in grace and not in judgment now. We are called to retire from the way of the world, and our hearts should be connected with all that is glorious and heavenly, for this is the present object of Christ. The white robes given to these sufferers, in chapter vi., are an evident mark of God's approbation. They were to rest till their brethren

who should be killed as they were should be fulfilled. Judgment must then take its course.

"In the tribulation and kingdom and patience." It will be the kingdom of Christ in power when the tribulation and patience are all over. But now the circumstances of that kingdom involve tribulation. The kingdom of heaven, as presented in Daniel, &c., was not a mystery. It means the reign of heaven on (or over) the earth. Christ, instead of getting His rightful place as Messiah when He came, was rejected, and went up to heaven; and thus it is that the mysteries of the kingdom come in. Hence it is that there must now be suffering and endurance even in the kingdom of Christ. When Christ appears in glory, all this will be at an end. Then will come the kingdom and power. (See Rev. xii.) It is the "kingdom and patience in Christ" now. That word "patience" is to be weighed well. We have communion with Jesus in this patient expectation; we wait for what He waits. A man that is born anew now is not in the kingdom and power, but in the kingdom and patience in Christ Jesus. Hence suffering here below naturally follows. So here the apostle John was thrown into the isle of Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus.

Thus, the ground on which John addresses the churches is not expressly as an apostle, but as their brother and companion in the tribulation and *kingdom* and patience in Christ Jesus. One remarkable trait which Christianity has brought out is, that God has opened to us another kingdom of an order differing from the earthly or Jewish one—a kingdom in which

there is tribulation, as far as natural circumstances are concerned, and patient hope the corresponding and distinguishing grace. But the Church has slipped out of its place of suffering and endurance; it has sought and taken the place of power in the world—the place that had belonged only to the Jews of right, and to the Gentile empires in divine sovereignty because of Israel's sins. In the presence of failure and of evil it becomes no one to be high-minded; where there is real separation from evil, there will not be this. Wherever it is a question of ceasing to do evil, there is great need of looking to the Lord, lest one should say, "this is what I have done, and what others have not done." Say rather it is all of the Lord's grace. But those Christians who desire to stand aloof from the evil around them are in evident danger of giving themselves a little bit of credit for doing something that other people are not doing. In the presence of evil that we have left, the effects of which we have still to judge in ourselves, it is not a time to indulge in great thoughts of ourselves.

When God is executing His purposes towards the earth, His people will have fellowship with what He is doing, as in the land of Egypt, in the wilderness, and in Canaan. But when we look at Christianity, it is not a question of earthly purposes, but of Jesus crucified through weakness, and of power put forth to raise Him again from the dead. There will be again a most solemn dealing on God's part when Christ will judge not only the living but the dead. But for us the fire of God's wrath has fallen upon Christ; His judgment was upon the head of His beloved Son.

And now God is imprinting on the hearts of His people heavenly glory. He is forming their character by these two great facts which meet in Christ; the one is the cross, and the other is the glory into which He ascended. What God has thus done in Christ is what He wants us to have communion with. As the Israelites had the law engraven on stones, so by the Spirit should Christ be written on our hearts and ways. The life of a creature may be lost, but what the believer has is the life of Christ; and can the life of Christ ever perish? Christ went through death in order that He might give a character of life that death could not touch. When the Lord God made man, He made him out of the dust of the field, but He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and therefore is it that the soul is immortal. He got this life direct from the breath of the Lord God. Sin, however, may touch it, and the second death—eternal misery in the lake of fire for soul and body. But that which Christ breathed after He rose from the dead (John xx. 22) was a life which death never could conquer, nor even assail more, over which nothing had a claim; and such is the life of every believer.

And yet there are those who fancy that the life of a believer may be lost! I can only say that God does not deal with those who so think according to their thoughts of Him. The life is as strong in the Arminian as in the Calvinist, because it is the life of *Christ*. When a man is conscious that he has failed and sinned against God, he is in great danger of thinking that his blessing is gone. But no; you have gone against the life, and against Him who is the

source of it; but the life itself is there still, and cannot be touched; it is eternal. Again, where a person is occupied in looking at the spiritual life within him, he will never have comfort. The proof that I am a Christian is, that I have received the testimony of God's love to me in Jesus.

Ver. 10. "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." The "Lord's day" is not at all the same thing as the "day of the Lord." The same expression (*κυριακός*) was used with regard to *the Lord's* supper, because it was not a common meal, but a holy and divinely instituted memorial of the Lord. So the Lord's day is not a common day, but one specially set apart, not as a command, but as the expression of the highest privilege, for the worship of the Lord. The sabbath was the last day which Jehovah claimed out of man's week; the Lord's day is the first day of God's week, and in a sense, we may say, of His eternity. The Christian *begins* with the Lord's day, that this may, as it were, give a character to all the days of the week. In spirit, the Christian is risen, and every day belongs to the Lord. Therefore is he to bring up the standard of each day that follows in the week to that blessed beginning, the Lord's day. To bring down the Lord's day to the level of another day only shows how gladly the heart drinks in anything that takes away somewhat from Christ. The man who only obeys Christ because he *must* do so has not got the spirit of obedience at all. We are sanctified not only to the blood of sprinkling, but to the obedience, of Jesus Christ—to the obedience of sons under grace, not to that of mere

servants under law. The lawlessness that despises the Lord's day is hateful; but that is no reason why Christians should destroy its character, by confounding the Lord's day, the new creation-day, with the sabbath of nature or of the law.

On that day, then, bright visions of glory passed before the prophet's eye. First, John tells us what he saw on that occasion: this is what we have in the rest of the first chapter. (Verses 12-20.) It was the vision of the glory of Christ's person, in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. "The things which are" (ver. 19) we have in chapters ii. iii., which describe the condition of the churches at that time. The third division of the Revelation consists of "the things which shall be after these." The version "hereafter" is vague, for it might mean thousands of years after. "After *these*" expresses the sense of the phrase much better. It means what was about to happen immediately after "the things which are" now—i.e. after the Church-condition. These we have from chapter iv. to the end of the book. The "things which are" continue still (in the most important application of the book). And what next? "What is about to happen after these things," when the Church has ceased to subsist on earth.

Let us look a little at what the apostle saw. First of all, he hears behind him "a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, What thou seest write in a book (or roll), and send to the seven churches: unto Ephesus," &c. (Ver. 11.) "And I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And being turned I saw seven golden candlesticks" (or lamp-stands). These were evidently derived from the light of the

tabernacle. Only in this case the lamp-stands were separate, so that the Lord could walk between them. They were golden, as in divine righteousness set here to give light. In the midst of the seven candlesticks he sees not exactly the Son of man, but "one like unto [the or a] Son of man." He is really God, but He is thus seen here. From John v. we may learn the force of this, and why it is, in this instance, Son of man, and not Son of God. The Son of God is the one who quickens, because He is a divine person; He quickens in communion with the Father. Thus, giving life, He is called the Son of God; but as Son of man, He executes judgment, because God will have Him honoured in the very nature in which man outraged Him. This at once shows us the bearing of what we have in the Revelation. It is as Son of man on the earth that Christ is here presented; and as such He is about to execute judgment upon the seven churches, as well as by and by upon the world.

The "garment down to the foot," with which He was clothed, shows not activity of work, but rather dignified priestly judgment. The "gold" of the girdle was the symbol of divine righteousness, as linen is the symbol of what is displayed before men. "His head and his hairs were white as white wool, as snow." So that, besides being the Son of man, and being seen in the garb and place of priestly discrimination, there are the emblems too of divine glory, as appears by comparing this passage with Daniel vii. What is said of the Ancient of days by Daniel is applied to the Son of man by John—the Ancient of days being the eternal God. John sees here that the Son of man

is Himself the Ancient of days. The same who wrote "The Word was with God, and the Word was God," and "the Word was made flesh," &c., sees also now in prophetic vision the combination of humanity with the emblems proper to Deity in the person of the Son of man. The head and hairs, being "white as white wool, as snow," show fulness of divine wisdom.

"His eyes like a flame of fire" set forth the penetration that marked Him in judgment. "His feet are like brass," &c. They could not contract any defilement, and are unbending in judicial strength among men. (Verses 12-15.) His voice expressed resistless power and majesty outside the control of men.

Such He is personally. Relative description follows in verse 16. "And he had in his right hand seven stars," the emblem of the angels, or representative rulers, of the seven churches. The word of judgment went out of His mouth; because in the Lord Jesus Christ to speak the word is at once to strike the blow. "He spake, and it was done." "His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength." Such He was officially. The churches' angels were represented as "stars" only, as being, of course, subordinate to the Lord.

We have supreme authority in the Lord, which is universal in its range, as the stars are His administrative lights in the churches, which He maintains by His power. He judges by His word those who have it or refuse it.

When John sees this wonderful vision of the Son

of man, he falls at His feet as dead. But the Lord puts His right hand of sustaining power upon His servant who lay trembling, nay, as dead, before Him, and says, "Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I became dead, and, behold, I am alive unto the ages of ages."* He is Jehovah yet man; but if He had not died, we should not have known Him in the blessed character and energy of life that He has proved now—life more abundantly. Christianity presents Christ as having passed through death, and as risen in triumph for God and His people. John is going to hear about judgments; but the knowledge that the right hand of Him who was alive for evermore had been upon him, and the words of His mouth would give him strength and courage for everything to come. And this is the spirit in which the book was written and should be read. "Behold, I am alive unto the ages of ages, and have the keys of hades and of death." The succession of these words in the common text is a mistake. Hades *follows* death, and does not go before it. (Rev. vi.) See also chap. xx. where we have "death and hell" mentioned several times in their regular order. And so in the best authorities it is here. When the Lord says that He has the keys of death and of hades, He intimates that He is the absolute master of all that appertains to life, either for the body or the soul.

Accordingly, also, in verse 19, a little word ought to be put in which adds to the force and connexion

* The "Amen," though read by B. and most of the cursives, seems due to the copyists making the phrase a doxology, either through unconscious habit, or designedly adding *ἀμήν* as a correction.

somewhat. "Write *therefore* what thou hast seen," &c. Because I am risen from the dead and am alive for evermore, and the sole ruler of death and hades, write therefore.—He who had bid John write (verses 11, 19) was the Son of man, with the characteristics of the Ancient of days; but He was also the living victorious Lord, the security against terror and death, the strengthener of His servants in presence of glory. "Write therefore what thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which are about to be after these." Human nature might well be confounded by the sight; but He who was revealed to John characterised Himself both as God and as the man who had passed through death and destroyed Satan's title and held the power for His own. And this was to be written, this revelation of Jesus as seen of John, as well as the existing church-state, and the things which should follow. (Verses 17-19.)

Verse 20 explains the mystery of the stars and candlesticks, as already indicated. It is the connecting link between the vision of Christ and the judgment of the church, or house of God on earth (Rev. ii. iii.), as long as its existence there is recognized as the object of His government. After that, it is the judgment of the world from God's throne in heaven, and Jews and Gentiles are variously dealt with, but *churches never*, in that part of the book. All this, and the reasons for it, will appear more distinctly as we proceed.

It is plain, from chap. i. 4, 11, and from what follows, that seven actually existing churches of provincial Asia were primarily meant. But while it is true that there were special reasons for addressing those

particular churches, it does not, to my own mind, admit of a doubt that they were selected with the further and larger design of presenting successive pictures of the church in general, from the apostolic days to the close of its existence on earth. Hence it is that there were *seven* golden candlesticks; seven being the well-known symbol of spiritual completeness. There might have been other churches as well or better known, and one of these seven had been already addressed formally by the great apostle of the Gentiles. But Ephesus is again taken up, and six other churches are associated, so as to make up a mystical and perfect sketch of the more important moral features which then existed, and which, at the same time, would successively be developed in the after history of the professing body upon the earth.*

* Every believer in the inspiration of the Apocalypse of course admits the *ever-living application* of the moral pictures set forth in Rev. ii., iii., as is true of the Acts in the New Testament, or of the histories in the Old Testament. But the idea that the seven churches represent all churches, or the general state and character in John's day, appears to be mere confusion. The truth is, that each represents a distinct moral state, in which the professing body, wholly or in part, might be at some given time. In a word, that the local assemblies then exhibited the special features described is true; but they could not all characterize the then existing state of the church in general, because they set forth different and even opposed moral conditions. If we admit, then, as we must, an enlarged application, beyond that to the actual assemblies or to mere individual conduct, the natural reference is to successive phases of spiritual condition, good or bad, in the history of the Christian profession. Perhaps the extreme partizans of the Protestant school of interpretation are not generally aware that their learned leader, Mede, thus expresses himself in his more mature "Short Observations on the Apocalypse" (Works, p. 905):—"If we consider their number being seven, which is a number of revolution of time, and therefore in this book the seals and trumpets and vials also are seven; and if we consider the choice of the Holy Ghost, in that He taketh neither all, no, nor the most famous church in the world, as Antioch, &c., and such no doubt had need of instruction, as well as those here named;—if

Many things that might seem most important in the eyes of men and even of Christians are passed by, for the Lord sees not as man sees.

Another striking feature claims our notice and admiration. It might have seemed impossible to reconcile prophetic light, as to the successive phases the church might assume from the apostolic age as long as it is found here below, with the continual expectation of Christ. But divine wisdom solved the difficulty even here, as the same end is secured in the Gospels and Epistles. The Lord was pleased to address seven contemporaneous and actually existing assemblies; but, in dealing with existing facts, He knew how to select and shape His instruction, so as to suit the states which should follow, till He comes. What a comment on the Lord's answer to Peter's query, "Lord, what shall this man (John) do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me." In this part of the book time is excluded. It is the present, however protracted—"the things which are."

But it will be found, I think, that He has here given prominence to those features, whether good or bad, which should reappear, and most aptly set forth

these things be well considered, may it not seem that these seven churches, besides this literal respect, were intended to be as patterns and types of the several ages of the catholic church *à principio ad finem*, that so these seven churches should prophetically sample unto us a sevenfold successive temper and condition of the whole visible church, according to the several ages thereof, answering to the pattern of the seven churches here? And if this be granted, viz., that they were intended to be so many patterns of so many states of the church, succeeding in the like order the churches are named, then surely the first church (viz., the Ephesian state) must be first, and the last be the last," &c.

what He foresaw to be of the deepest moment for him who might have an ear to hear till He comes again. And this extensive application seems to me strongly confirmed by that clause of the threefold division in chap. i. 19, which bears on these churches. They are characterized as "*the things which are.*" No doubt they existed then, in the time of John; but if they continued to exist, and if seeds that were then sown germinated yet more in after days and thus imparted a graver significance to the words and warnings of our Lord, that subsisting state of the church on earth would still be fitly designated "*the things which are.*"

Thus, Ephesus is the first great sample of decline through a relaxation or abandonment of first love. But was not this the notorious fact in Christendom, as a whole, before the last apostle departed to be with the Lord? If in those days and yet more in the times which followed, there was a similar moral state, what more apt and natural than to treat the moral circumstances so as to convey the general lesson? Again, without questioning that the message to Smyrna fully applied at that time, it is easy to see that the great and repeated persecutions, which broke out upon Christians from the heathen, are admirably set forth by it. So again, the Balaam element would naturally come into great distinctness, when the world patronised instead of persecuting. Then, further, Jezebel is an immense advance in evil; and though there was, no doubt, that which furnished occasion for these references at the time when the Apocalypse was given, can it be denied that the outline was filled up in a most striking way, after the throne of the world established

Christianity by its edicts, and when, at a later epoch still, the professing church formed a guilty union with virtual heathenism and enmity to the truth of God?

This glance, rapid as it is, over chap. ii., will show why I conceive that these churches are to be viewed as having a real, if indirect, prophetic bearing upon the subsequent states of the Church as they presented themselves to the Lord's all-searching judgment. On the other hand, it is clear that to have made this bearing so marked as to be apparent from the first; to have given a distinct chronological history, if one may so say, would have falsified the true posture of the Church in habitually waiting for the Lord from heaven. For the Lord has nowhere else so spoken to or about the Church, as to keep it necessarily waiting for ages upon the earth. The Lord knew that it would be so, of course, but He revealed nothing that would interfere with the full enjoyment of the blessed hope of the Lord's return as an immediate thing. And so it is here.

Some have taken advantage of this indistinctness to deny that these seven churches have the successive and protracted character which I have alluded to; but the evidence will appear more fully, as we look at each church severally. Another consideration which ought to weigh much is, that, after these two chapters, churches are nowhere referred to as existing longer on the earth. In the concluding remarks of the book, (chap. xxii. 16,) the Lord says that He has sent His angel to testify these things in the churches. But throughout the entire course of the visions and in all that is intimated of the condition of men here below, after Rev.

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CHAPTER II.

EPHESUS.

I will now look at the first of the seven churches particularly (ver. 1-7). First, let us observe that in is told to write to the *angel* of the church there. The address is no longer to "the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus." Nor is it to the saints with the bishops and deacons, as the Lord was to the Philippian church. Why is this? The Lord's ways are always full of grace; but they are righteous withal, and the church was a fallen and ailing thing, so that He could no longer address them

His familiar love as formerly. Thus there was a departure of the most serious kind from Himself, and John is directed to address, not the church, but its angel or representative. The angels spoken of in these epistles were men, and must not be confounded with the class of spiritual beings called angels.* The apostle John is employed by the Lord to send a message to them, and it would be contrary to all the ways

God to use man as a messenger to angels in the

* Origen and Andreas adopted the latter meaning, but Epiphanius and others expressly reject it. Many moderns suppose that the term is derived from the synagogue and that it answers to the *מלאך* and *המלאך*. But if this be so, the angel of the church cannot mean even a presbyter, much less the president or chief of the presbyters, as Vitringa argues, but rather what is called clerk or sexton. The New Testament term for this chazan or angel of the synagogue seems to be *ὑπηρέτης*, who had the care of the *oks*, &c. (Luke iv. 20). The ruler, or *ἀρχισυνάγωγος*, was quite distinct; and of these there were several (Acts xiii. 15). Compare ghtfoot (Opp. II. pp. 279, 310.)

ordinary meaning of the word. Angels often acted between God and man, but not men between Him and angels.

But, further, there is no sufficient ground to affirm that the angel here addressed, though a man, is in such an official place necessarily as a bishop or elder. He might have such a charge, or he might not. "The angel" always gives the thought of representation. In the Old Testament we have the angel of Jehovah of the covenant, &c., and in Daniel we read of angels who were identified with Israel or other powers. In the New Testament we have the angels of the little children always beholding the face of their Father in heaven, which clearly means their representatives. So of Peter in Acts xii.—they said it was his angel. We may gather then that the angel here, though a man, is, in some way or another, the ideal responsible representative of an assembly. Hence, it could be said, "I will take away *thy* candlestick." It would be extremely objectionable to make this a defined official place, as it would introduce not merely a novelty, but one that clashes with all that is elsewhere taught in scripture as to the assembly. But it will not be doubted that in assemblies we find, as a fact, a particular person whom the Lord specially links with the assembly as characterizing it: he is morally identified with it, and receives from the Lord either praise or condemnation, according to the state of the assembly.

Here the angel is directly charged with the state of the assembly. The address being to him, and not to the assembly, put them, as it were, at farther distance from the Lord. What a tale this tells of the dreadful condition

into which the Church had got! He could no longer address these assemblies immediately. He *had* spoken directly to the Corinthians even; for, guilty as they were, they had not so loved Him, and then relaxed. But here the message is, "Thou hast left thy first love." Yet, if He had not a faithful church, He had, at least, a faithful servant in John: and he it is who in the first instance is spoken to. And be it ever remembered that the church has never since recovered from that failure and place of comparative distance. The church, the house of God, is a complete ruin here below. And in ruin the first thing that becomes us is that we feel it.

This in no way touches eternal salvation; but the certainty of salvation is abused when employed to lessen what is due to God. In fact, there is never a real sense of sin before conversion; for if it could be then, it would be accompanied with absolute despair. But after, we have not conversion only, but perfect peace, we can bear to look at our sin, and we can afford to judge it thoroughly. A holy angel does not know God as we ought to do—I do not say as we *do*, though that be true also. An angel enters into the wonders of God's power, "hearkening unto the voice of His word." But the depths of God come out, marvellous to say, about our sin, and in His only-begotten, "seen of angels" indeed, but in living relationship with us.

Here the Lord presents Himself as the One "that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, that walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." (Ver. 1.) He speaks of Himself as having authority over all

the representatives of the heavenly light and going about among the vessels of His testimony. The representative is addressed, the assembly is none the less responsible and dealt with accordingly. He is come to investigate, to judge,—not yet, of course, the ungodly world, but the assembly in Ephesus. What a difference between such a sight as this, and the view we have of Him and of the church too in Eph. i. ii. ! There He is seated at God's right hand in the heavenly places, and there too God has made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Here He is walking in the midst of the candlesticks. His hand is needed ; for none but He could meet the difficulties. But is it not solemn that He is so presented to that very church, to which Paul had opened out the fulness of His heavenly grace, the fulness of their own blessing in Him ? But here He is obliged, as it were, to walk and vindicate His authority, not among those who know Him not, but where His love had once been well known—alas ! now forgotten and dishonoured.

Observe the *general* character, as has been truly remarked, of this the first address throughout all its parts. Such is Christ's description ; such is the sin ; such the warning to the angel ; and such the promise to the overcomer. His position is ecclesiastical generally, holding the seven stars and walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.

"I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and that thou canst not bear evil men ; and thou hast tried those that call themselves apostles and are not, and hast found them liars : and thou hast patience, and hast borne for my name's sake and art not wearied."

(Verses 2, 3.)* Thus there were many things to praise. There was patience, and this is the first sign, if not the greatest, that Paul gives of his own apostleship. More than this: there is nothing more easy to break down than patience, after it has stood many a trial. But here, at Ephesus, there was endurance. (Compare verses 2, 3.) Again, where there is patience, there might be the tendency to pass over evil, or at least evil men. But it was not so here. They had borne for His name's sake, but they could not bear evil persons; and they had tried those that pretended to the highest place—to be apostles, and had found them liars. And thus they had gone on, and were not weary. How sweet of the Lord (in His sorrow and, if we may so say, His disappointed love) thus to begin with all that was good!

But though there was what He could praise, He had against them that they had left their first love. It is quite evident that this is nothing special, but the general spirit or principle of declension of the church at large. Indeed it is very broad: so the angels that left their first estate; so Adam; so Israel. Alas! we must add now the assembly of God, blessed and loved

* The common text, followed by the Authorized version, is in some respects corrupted.—Their toil was known, and endurance they were not only eminent for, but they had it still. They had proved intolerant of evil persons and especially of such as falsely claimed high ecclesiastical authority; whilst they had manifested their willingness to bear wrongs or afflictions for Christ's sake; and in all this they were not weary. Such is the sense of the right readings and the true order. For *οὐ κεκοπίας* (or *οὐκ ἐκοπίας*) Erasmus adopted, from his copy which had got mixed up with the comment of Andreas, *κεκοπῖ. καὶ οὐ κέκμηκας*. A few mss., (16. 37. 38. 69.,) and Vv. drop *οὐ* before *κεκοπίας*, perhaps to seem verbally consistent with *κόπον* in the verse before; but the evidence for what I have given seems overwhelming.

beyond them all. They had let slip the consciousness of the Lord's love to them, and hence their own love to Him had waned. What produced love in them was their appreciation of the Lord's love.

Let me just remark that the word "somewhat," in ver. 4, seems to weaken the sense? It might convey the idea that the Lord had but little against them; whereas, in truth, He was exceedingly grieved. Not to feel His love, not to return it consequently, was no small failure, especially where that love had once been enjoyed. But now it was faded, and what would not follow in time? "Remember, therefore, whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works; or else I am coming unto thee, and I will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent." It is a much easier thing to be zealous in doing, than in repenting. But even this would not satisfy His heart, unless they got back to that first love which had produced their first works; otherwise the candlestick must be removed. The spring of grace is as gone.

I doubt, on grounds both external and internal, that "quickly" should be in ver. 5. For when He thus comes to judge the ways of His own people, can it be so said? Doubtless, when He comes, whether to fight with the Nicolaitanes, or to take us to Himself, it is quickly. (Rev. ii. 16; iii. 11; xxii. 7, 12, 20.) But the Lord gives space for repentance, even if it were to Jezebel; and how much more to His beloved Ephesians?

The removal of the candlestick does not imply that the church might not go on apparently as before; but that it lost its place as a trustworthy witness for the Lord. Here again all is general: it would suit the

Christian everywhere. Nothing makes up for distance between His people (or between the soul) and Christ. And such was the case, not merely with the assembly in Ephesus, but with the Church generally, I think we may say, even then. This, to my mind, confirms the successional aim of "the things which are." Outward testimony might go on, but that is not what the Lord most values; though value it He does, as far as it is simple, genuine, and faithful. Still, He cannot but prize most of all hearts devoted to Himself, the fruit of His own personal, self-sacrificing, perfect love. He has a spouse upon earth, whom He desires to see with no object but Himself, kept pure for Him from the world and its ways. God has called us for this: not only for salvation, and for a witness to Himself in godliness, though this is most true and important, but beyond all for Christ—a bride for His Son! Surely this should be our first and last and constant and dearest thought; for we are affianced to Christ, and He at least has proved the fulness and faithfulness of His love to us. But what of ours?

The effect of thus looking at Christ is that the Church is kept in the dust, and yet always rejoicing in Him. For the sense of failure in ourselves and others would be oppressive, but that we are entitled to find our joy in One who has never failed, and who, notwithstanding, loves us who have given such a feeble and faltering witness for Him. Hence if we but go to *Him* so known, even in sorrowful confession, He will not let us part without blessing and strength. It is due to Him to own and feel our sin; but to be occupied merely with failure never gives power: Christ

must have the glory. And assuredly He who has delivered us from the wrath to come, He who can save from hell, can keep or snatch from every ditch on earth. Only let the Christian confess his sin, cleaving to Jesus: this vindicates His name, who comes to his succour, and then the victory is sure.

But what a comfort and how reassuring to find that after His censure, the Lord again speaks of what He can commend! "But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes which I also hate." (Ver. 6.) The essence of Nicolaitanism seems to have been the abuse of grace to the disregard of plain morality. The Ephesians saints had failed in cleaving with fresh fervour to that which is good, but they had fellowship with the Lord, rejecting false pretensions and abhorring what is evil. People often say, there is no such thing as a perfect church on earth. I would ask such what they mean by a perfect church. Will any Christian man tell me that we are not to aim at everything consistent with the holiness of God? I claim for the church just what must be allowed for every individual Christian. As there may be too many faults in the individual, so there may be in the church. But then there is this blessedness, that, as there is One who dwells in the individual to guide and bless him, so the same Spirit dwells in the church, and Christ cleanses it with the washing of water by the word. With the assembly, as it is with the individual, who has both the Holy Ghost who is the power of good, and the flesh which lusts against Him. As, in a man, the soul may be said to pervade the whole body, animating it in every part; so it is with the Spirit in the church

of God. When persons maintain that holiness may be tolerated because no man is free from sin, it is anti-nomianism; and I believe it to be the very principle of the Nicolaitanes. Each individual is bound to be ready to meet the Lord, having nothing left to be wound up when He comes. The Lord looks for the same thing from the assembly, because there is a divine power against evil in the church as in the saint.

Then comes the promise, with the word of admonition before it; and all is very general, like the danger and the threat. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of my God." (Ver. 7.)

As for the paradise of creation, man had been put there and tried by the simplest test of obedience in a single instance; but he fell. Now a new scene is opened. It is no longer the garden of Eden, but the paradise of God—"of My God," says the Lord Jesus—not of God only, in contrast with man, but of "My God," as Jesus knew Him. Into this redemption brings us. And therein is no tree of responsibility that could bring in sorrow and death. The tree of life alone is there, which the glorified saint shall enjoy in peace. The church in Ephesus had fallen, it is true, from first love: but is anything too hard or good for the Lord? Did any feel deeply and aright the wrong that was done to His grace? If there was but one who overcame (for overcoming it must be now, by faith, not mere preservation of original blessing, and overcoming inside the church too) to him was this promise given to comfort and cheer his soul. The Lord's grace is just as full now.

May there be none here who have not ears to hear: if there are any who have, may they hear and overcome!

It is all well to "hear the church" in discipline, confiding in Him who is in the midst. But when the church leaves its first love, and claims all the more loudly to be heard, taking the place of Christ or of the Spirit, pretending to teach, what then? "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the *Spirit* saith unto the churches." Individual responsibility comes distinctly out now in Christianity (as in Matthew xiii., after the proclamation in chapter xii. of the judgment of Israel).

SMYRNA.

Ver. 8—11. In Ephesus we have seen departure from first standing. The next state is a different one. We have the church at Smyrna in trouble; the saints of God are suffering. They may have thought the fiery trial some strange thing that had happened to them. But, on the contrary, it is more true that the Lord is grieved with a Christian when He leaves him without trouble for righteousness or for His name's sake. The Lord had Himself known tribulation to the utmost; but in Him it was only the trial of the good that was within, and the bringing out of His perfection. And poor as we are, we too may know trial apart from our evil. The Lord has two objects in view when He lays His hand upon a Christian in the way of chastening. It may come either because there has been something wrong, or because he is in danger of it and this is little felt by him. When David was out of tribulation, he falls into a snare. When his circumstances were full of trouble, then it was that

he (inspired, of course, by the Holy Ghost) poured out those sweet strains that we read with joy to this day. The desire to get out of trial is a perilous thing for the soul. The trial may be sent to show us what we really are, or, what is better, to prove what God is for us and to us: but it may be also sent to prevent us from falling into sin. The Lord, in His love, thus often averts the evil which He sees and we do not. I do not doubt that there is another and a deeper character of suffering, even fellowship with the sufferings of Christ, which must not be confounded with the Lord's faithful discipline, though, sometimes, I suppose, the two things may be in a measure combined. In a certain sense all saints suffer now *with* Him, though all may not be called to suffer *for* Him.

In Smyrna the Lord appears to have been meeting the declension from first love that had set in, and, in order to do this, He sent tribulation. It is no uncommon case—thanks to His name, for He is good and faithful. In what capacity does He speak to them? "These things saith the first and the last, which was dead and is alive." His title, first of all, is that of a divine person as against Satan. The Spirit claims for Jesus here, what Isaiah had before challenged for Jehovah. (Isaiah xli. 4.) And what was there that could not be claimed for Him? He "which was dead and is alive." What a comfort for those who were in trial! Who is it that speaks to them in their tribulation? The One who had been in the deepest of sorrow and had gone through death itself. He who was the First and the Last, and who had formed all,—He was the One that had died and was alive again.

And this is the very One that I have to flee to in my trial. You will see thereby what a connexion there is between the quickening of the dead, and the comfort of those who are in trial. (Compare 2 Cor. i-v.) Jesus was God, but He was man also. He was the suffering man, and He was the triumphant man ; and as such He was able to comfort them in their tribulation. What had He not gone through Himself ?

“I know [thy works and] tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich,) and the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews and are not, but [are] the synagogue of Satan.” (Ver. 9.) The word “Jews” here is used symbolically. It was a name given to the nation that was known as God’s people, above all others, in olden time ; and these symbols were taken from the Old Testament. It seems to mean persons who, taking the place of being children of God, went back to hereditary religion. On the one hand, there was this outward trouble, which the Lord allowed for their blessing, and, on the other, there were those who were insisting on Jewish principles. (Phil. iii. 2.) But the Lord says, “Fear not those things which thou shalt suffer.” Do not mind what persons say, or things done against you. “Behold the devil shall cast [some] of you into prison, that ye may be tried.” Thus, by God’s grace, the enemy himself is used as an instrument for the good of God’s people in the persecutions which he stirs up against them. There is nothing, on the other hand, whereby Satan more effectually draws aside than through a sort of quiet, easy-going, half-and-half Christianity. God grant that His children may be preserved from having two faces or characters

—that the Christian may never be worldly with worldly people, and then put on the ways and words of a saint with his brethren.

It is no new thing for the Lord thus to allow the efforts and enmity of Satan for the blessing of His saints. In the case of Job we see the same thing: indeed the Lord probed His servant there far more deeply. At each successive trial from Satan, Job retained his integrity, and blessed the Lord; but the Lord showed Job *himself*—the very thing he needed for the full blessedness of turning away from self to the Lord. Then He showed him *God*, and Job's comfort at last was as deep as his self-abasement.

Job had no idea that he thought too much of himself; but this was just what God had to show him he did. He loved to recall the time when the fruits of godliness in him drew forth the respect and esteem of men. But God showed him how evil a thing it is to be occupied with the effects of grace in himself or on others. What the enemy of God and man could not do, Job's friends did. He could stand against the temptations of Satan, but he was provoked to folly by his friends coming to condole with him, and giving their misdirected opinions. When a person talks much about grace, not a little unjudged self is apt to be found there, we may be sure. Even Job had to be put in the furnace to find out that there was a great deal more besides grace in him. But though Satan might tempt without success, and his friends only provoke, when the Lord Himself comes in, then Job is soon thoroughly humbled. He sees himself in the light of the presence of God, and exclaims, "Mine eye seeth thee. Where-

fore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." But the end of the Lord is as good at least as His beginning. He is ever pitiful, and of tender mercy. And it is when Job thinks nothing of himself that the true stream of grace flows out, and he prays for his friends. "And the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends."

The case of Smyrna follows that of Ephesus. As already hinted, I should apply the church of Smyrna to the time when the church was called to pass through the tribulation that followed the era of the apostles—the persecutions that were inflicted on the Christians by the Roman emperors. But it is good to remember that all is measured of the Lord. "Behold the devil shall cast [some] of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days." (Ver. 10.) The sufferings, death for Christ's sake, &c., of the Christians, were the few bright spots and manifestations of life in the second and beginning of the third centuries.

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life." (Ver. 10.) The distinction of God's servants in glory is an important doctrine. For while it is essential to maintain that the very same grace which pardoned the thief on the cross was needed to save Paul of Tarsus, yet it would be a grand mistake to suppose that the thief will have the same reward in glory. Nevertheless, we must not be afraid when the Lord says to us, "I know thy works." For though the vessels that are to contain the blessing may not be equally large, the little cup will be as full as the big one; and full, if I may so say, of the same

materials of joy and blessing. In a glorified state there will be no such thing, of course, as a person being tried—no question of being faithful or unfaithful then. Before we get there, spiritual differences exist; and when we are there, the distinctions of Christ's kingdom will answer to the character and measure of service here below, though the sovereignty of God must be maintained also. (Matt. xix. xx.)

There was this suited word of comfort to the faithful in Smyrna—"He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." (Ver. 11.) Do not fear the first death; it is only a servant to usher you into the presence of God. The second death will *not* touch *you*. The Lord is like that tree of old which was cast into the waters of Marah. He went into the bitterest waters of death, which have thus been changed into sweetness and refreshing for us.

PERGAMOS.

Ver. 12—18. The Lord here announces Himself to the angel of the church in Pergamos as One who was armed with all-searching power by the word of God, the piercing word that judges. In the book of Revelation, the sharp sword is at the command of the Lord Jesus, as the instrument of judgment. What the sword does in the hand of man, the word of searching judgment does which the Lord applies in power; it decides all questions that have to do with Him. There is always a great and beautiful connexion between the way or title in which He presents Himself and the state of the church which He is addressing. It was because the word was no longer that which had living

energy to judge in the church, that the Lord Jesus takes care to show that it had never lost its power in His hands. As the first church shows us declension set in, even in the days of the apostle John, and Smyrna the time of persecution from the heathen, so here we have a totally different state of things. Pergamos is the scene of Satan's flattering power or seduction, which was just what he used after the violence of persecution had spent itself. It was a more dangerous device than the second; for when our hearts are set on anything that is wrong, there is nothing that more shows God against our ways than His giving us up to our own will. "Ephraim is joined unto idols: *let him alone.*" In the case of Smyrna it was the contrary of this; it was the Lord intercepting the power of Satan through persecution from without, which was used of God to hinder the growing corruption within.

After that, the god of this world promised Christians every worldly advantage. The emperor himself offered to become a Christian, though he put off baptism till his death-bed. There was no plainer proof how completely the church has fallen and had departed from the Lord's name, than when it accepted the emperor's terms and the patronage of the world. Even those who were saved had entirely lost sight of what the church was, as not belonging to the world but of heaven. The Roman empire was essentially the world's power. The church had been called out to be the standing witness of these two things: first, of the world's ruin; and secondly, of God's love. But when we see the church shaking hands with the world, all

is gone, and the church falls right down into the mind of this age. If the world gains in some respects, the church loses in everything; and no wonder, because it is at the cost of the will and glory of Christ.

Satan's "throne" is the sense: in presence of it, who does not see the propriety with which the Lord presents Himself, as armed with the sharp two-edged sword? It is the same word as is used for "*seat*," as well as "throne" in other parts of this very book; but here it is properly a "throne," because Satan is spoken of in respect of authority. It is obvious that all this exactly describes the state of things in Constantine's time. Instead of being at the stake and suffering for Christ's sake, the church was now yoked with the world in a mere profession of Christianity; for as the world did not really rise to Christ, the church must sink to the world's level. No wonder the Lord says thereon, "Thou dwellest where Satan's throne is." Yet He allows all that He can, even where this miserable association was found—His assembly dwelling where Satan's throne was. They maintained still His name, and did not deny the faith which was given to the Saints; but that was all. They had just come out of the great persecution in which Antipas was slain. But now the church at Pergamos, instead of suffering, was dwelling quietly in the world. Like Lot, they too had their righteous souls vexed with the ungodliness of those around.

The Lord, accordingly, brings forward the things of which He had to warn them. "Thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam." (Ver 14). What was the leading feature we see in the son of Beor? He was led by his covetousness to try and

serve the bad king of Moab by cursing the people of God. When God gave him an answer, he goes to God a second time, because his heart wanted its own way. And it is solemn to learn that if God gives you up, you may get what you want. Balaam afterwards falls into even worse evil. He was indeed a man whose heart was not with God. He said some true things, but his spirit was not in them. He always speaks as it were from without, as a miserable man, afar from the blessing which he saw. "I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh," &c. He goes on, step by step, until he lends himself to be the corrupter, through the world, even of God's chosen people. And so it was with the church. Even the philosophers began to take up Christian truth, and in the writings of the fathers we find pretty much what we have here. What fornication is in moral things, such was their illicit commerce with the world in the things of God. There were, I doubt not, witnesses who were made very little account of, save in heaven; but one of the men who had the largest and most lasting influence of all, Augustine, was a true saint of God, and, though that is not saying much, the greatest light of the western church. He had held the name of Christ and had not denied his faith. All agree that these epistles applied primarily to the churches to which John wrote: but many do not see that they also apply to different stages of the Church, and describe its various states successively.

The doctrine of the Nicolaitanes* seems an evil from

* The true reading of verse 15 is "*likewise*," instead of "which thing I hate," which was probably copied from ii. 6. The sense is that there were such as held the Nicolaitane doctrine, as well as those who held that of Balaam.

within, as that of Balaam was rather from without. Such it was in principle and doctrine now. We read of their *deeds* in Ephesus, but this went farther and deeper. It was a corruption of grace, a turning it to licentiousness. Sanctity is the greatest snare if it be not real, yea, if it flows not from the truth; yet nothing more terrible than that where grace is known or at least talked of, it should be abused. If we search our own hearts and ways, we shall find that it is the very thing we all tend to do. Grace has set us completely free through Him who died and rose again, and what claim has it not on our hearts? Do we not often treat God's grace to us in the very same way that our children in their most hardened mood treat us? They then take all as a matter of right. Though creation has been brought under subjection to vanity on account of Adam's sin, yet there is no moral evil connected with its lower forms. But in man's case it is not so. Knowing the evil, he yet goes on in it. And even when we have got the certainty of deliverance, if the joy of it have passed away in a measure, we begin to use the Lord's grace just to serve ourselves. This, carried out without conscience, is Nicolaitanism. God's grace was meant to bind us thoroughly to Himself. We might see a person fall into evil (and this, of course, is sorrowful indeed, in a Christian); but there is a great deal more of evil that others do *not* see. God gives us the opportunity of judging ourselves when no one else, perhaps, knows anything about it. If we do not judge it, then the end here below is that the judgment of the world comes; and we may be sure what a vast amount of evil must have gone on in

secret, when God allows us to fall so that the very world judges our course as evil. But we must not be discouraged. It is just where the truth is most preached and held, that Satan will invariably try to bring in the worst of heresies, in order to bring shame upon the testimony of God. When a man slips from the highest pinnacle, of course he will have a more terrible fall; as also it will be much more manifest to the world than if he had merely upset on the plain.

The Lord does not say, "I will fight against *thee* with the sword of my mouth," but "against *them*." (Ver. 16.) The sword of judgment may, it is true, act in taking them away by death, as in the case of the Corinthian saints, who were judged of the Lord ~~here~~ below that they might not afterwards be condemned with the world. Christian discipline does not mean putting away those who are not Christians from those who are; rather it contemplates the purging out of Christians who are walking wrongly, in order to maintain the honour and holiness of the Lord in their midst. Mercy is the great motive of discipline, next to the maintaining of Christ's character in the church. It is at the bottom of the Lord's ways with us, and surely it should be so for us with others.

The fact of the church's getting into the world isolated at once the faithful Christian. The church only became invisible through sin. It was not God's *intention*, it is not according to His heart, that it should ever be so, though I believe that all was permitted and ordered wisely. God did not make a light to be hid, but to be set on a candlestick. Such was the fact now: catholicism reigned, if you take the pro-

tracted view, which soon paved the way for Popery. But if the word penetrated him who had an ear to hear, it gave secret fellowship with Christ when the public position had become settledly false. Hence to a true-hearted saint, amid all this ruin and confusion, He says, "I will give to eat of the hidden manna." (Ver. 17.) The manna represents Christ Himself as He came down from heaven and took a place of abasement in the world. Those who were slipping away into the world are reminded of the place which Christ took down here. The "*hidden manna*" refers to the use which was made of the manna for the ark: a certain portion of it was taken into the holy place as a memorial before God. The faithful are to eat not of the manna only, but of the hidden manna.

It is not merely that we shall share in and enjoy with Christ all His glory as exalted on high and as displayed before the world; but God will give us special communion with Christ as He was here below. The sweet thing in the glory will be that the blessed One, who has brought us into all the enjoyment and peace of heaven, is the same One we have known in all His path of sorrow and rejection in this world, with whom we have shared it ever so feebly here, feeding on Him as our portion even now. The white stone was a mark of entire acquittal. May we be thus looking forward to Christ; and may God give us to taste His own delight in His Son as He was here below, in His outcast position! May we have, besides, the white stone, the portion of the faithful in a state of things like that of Pergamos when the church and the world were enjoying themselves together! When in

heaven such will enjoy the same food that sustains them here. Christ will still be your food even in the glory, and you will have the white stone, "and on the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth save he that receiveth it" (i.e. the expression of Christ's own secret satisfaction in the way in which you have suffered for Him and served Him below). Assuredly the heart will most prize what Christ will give between Himself and it alone—what none will know but ourselves and Himself. The Lord grant that we may have tokens of love for *Him*, although none should know them but Himself now. Even in glory the joy of His secret approval will not be lost but known more profoundly than ever.

THYATIRA.

Ver. 18—28. There is an important change that occurs in this chapter, beginning with the epistle to Thyatira. In the first three churches the warning word ("He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches") comes before the promise; but all the four concluding churches have the promise before the call to hear. These at least will be found to be the representatives of states of the church which go down to the end.

Now there must be a reason for it—a wise and sufficient reason why the Holy Ghost should uniformly adopt one arrangement in the three earlier epistles, and as uniformly depart from this and adopt another arrangement in the four last. There is nothing haphazard in the word. As everything He has done in His dealings with man, as all that He has made even

creation, has its purpose impressed by Him, so much more is it with that word which develops His ways and displays His moral glory. And this is of the most practical moment to us. For, remember, the secret of strength is in a Spirit-taught knowledge of God and His ways in Christ. To enter into and enjoy the thoughts and feelings of God as manifested in what He does and says, in His own revelation of Himself, that which wins and keeps, purifies and strengthens the heart of the believer. Israel did not understand His ways, and, therefore, never knowing His heart, they erred in their own; as it is said, "they do always err in their heart, for they have not known my ways." Moses, on the other hand, did appreciate the heart of God, and accordingly of him it is written that "the Lord made known His ways unto *Moses*."

In the first three churches, then, the call to hear is addressed formally to the whole assembly concerned; but in the last four the change of situation appears to mark greater reserve. The Lord no longer, as it were, expects any to hear but him who overcomes, and this class is thenceforth, in a manner, singled out from the rest. Evil had now set in over the professing body; that the promise is not, and could no longer be, held out in the old indiscriminate way. From this distinction we gather a remnant begins to be more and more clearly indicated.

Something analogous to this appears elsewhere. Thus, in the seven parables of Matt. xiii. the last three are unquestionably marked off from their predecessors, and were addressed to a higher degree of spirituality. The first four were uttered outside to

heaven such will enjoy the same food that sustains them here. Christ will still be your food even in the glory, and you will have the white stone, "and on the stone a new name written, which no one knoweth save he that receiveth it" (i.e. the expression of Christ's own secret satisfaction in the way in which you have suffered for Him and served Him below). Assuredly the heart will most prize what Christ will give between Himself and it alone—what none will know but ourselves and Himself. The Lord grant that we may have tokens of love for *Him*, although none should know them but Himself now. Even in glory the joy of His secret approval will not be lost but known more profoundly than ever.

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in creation, has its purpose impressed by Him, so much more is it with that word which developes His ways and displays His moral glory. And this is of vast practical moment to us. For, remember, the secret of strength is in a Spirit-taught knowledge of God and His ways in Christ. To enter into and enjoy the thoughts and feelings of God as manifested in what He does and says, in His own revelation of Himself, is that which wins and keeps, purifies and strengthens the heart of the believer. Israel did not understand His ways, and, therefore, never knowing His heart, they erred in their own; as it is said, "they do always err in their heart, for they have not known my ways." Moses, on the other hand, did appreciate the heart of God, and accordingly of him it is written that "the Lord made known His ways unto *Moses*."

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the multitude, the last three to the disciples only within the house. Wherever we find in the Bible a series of parables, prophetic visions, or the like, grouped together as these are, there is commonly, not to say invariably, some such line drawn between those which commence with a general bearing, and those which become more special and narrow as we approach the goal. This is strikingly true of these Apocalyptic epistles, the last four of which sever the overcomer from the unfaithful surrounding mass. In short, the formation of a faithful remnant, who were at first, I suppose, only morally separate from the body which bore the Lord's name (now alas! untruly), becomes increasingly distinct. In the case of Thyatira the Spirit of God seems to make the principle plain and patent, as will appear presently.

The Lord Jesus introduces Himself here in His character of Son of God, followed by a description borrowed in the main from the vision which the apostle had seen in chap. i. "And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write, These things saith the Son of God that hath his eyes as a flame of fire, and his feet [are] like fine brass" (ver. 18).

If we trace what the scriptures say of the Lord Jesus viewed thus, two things more particularly are seen. As Son of God, He is the source and sovereign giver of *life* (John v). The life which we by faith derive ("for he that believeth *hath* everlasting life") from the Lord Jesus Christ, is life in such power, that even the bodies of such as possess it in Him will rise from the graves to a life-resurrection; while others

who have it not must rise to a judgment-resurrection (John v. 28, 29). In the resurrection of judgment none can be saved. No Christian will appear before the judgment-seat of Christ as a criminal to be tried. All Christians will appear before it (as must all men), but the result before the world will be, in spite of loss of reward in certain cases, their glorious manifestation as justified men. But if you or I had to appear to see whether we were righteous, and so could escape condemnation, could there be one ray of hope for us? Notwithstanding, there never can be, or at least there never ought to be, a doubt as to the absolute salvation of those who have life in and from the Son of God. The judgment-seat of Christ will clearly display them as justified persons; but we need not and should not wait for the judgment-seat to know that we are justified: we are dishonouring God's grace and His Son's work not to know it now, "whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us." Faith is entitled by divine warrant to a full justification, now and here below, according to the worth and acceptance of the Lord Jesus in God's sight.

And this leads me to the second of the things I had alluded to, as connected with the "Son of God." He gives *liberty* as well as life. "If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John viii. 36). These are the two great aspects of blessing which characterize Jesus as the Son of God. He imparts not only life, but liberty too. Not that they have always or necessarily gone together. For a man might have spiritual life and yet be in grievous bondage, as one observes too often. This is also what we

read of in Rom. vii. A person who is converted has life, but may be withal the most miserable of men as regards his own experience. "Oh wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" In chap. viii. we have the answer of grace. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free (or delivered me), from the law of sin and death." Liberty now goes with the life of the Son of God, for He is the risen Lord who died for me and discharged me from all the claims of law and of every other thing or one which might else arrest my blessing. The servant does not abide ever in the house, *he* might have notice to quit; but there is no such thing as the son's leaving the house. And it is thus, as sons, God puts us in His house, in the place of full and holy liberty.

What a searching but blessed title this was for the Lord Jesus to take, especially if He was not only providing for the then need of the assembly in Thyatira, but picturing besides that state of departure from truth, and even the depths of Satan, which characterized the middle ages! In Ephesus, when almost all the apostles had disappeared from the world, there was decay of first love; in Smyrna, persecution from the heathen powers; then in Pergamos, the allusion is plain to the era when Christianity gained the ascendant in the world, and when consequently the church consummated and sealed the loss of her sacred and heavenly separateness upon the earth. The power of the world never gained a greater victory than when it was externally vanquished by the cross; when, by merely professing Christ's name in baptism, all the Roman world was treated as born of God—in short,

when apparently heathenism, but really Christianity, succumbed before the rising sun of Christendom. In many respects it may have been a mercy for mankind, as it certainly was the greatest event in the government of the world since the flood; but who can estimate the loss for the saints, and the dishonour of their Lord, when the Christian body exchanged their place of suffering now in grace, hoping for glory with Christ at His coming, for present authority in, yea over, the world? In Thyatira we arrive at a period darker still—the natural consequence of those pleasures of sin for a season. When the empire professed the cross and arrayed it with gold, it was not only that God's children were favoured and caressed, instead of having to wander in sheep-skins and goat-skins, or to hide in dens and caves of the earth, but inevitably their enemies were attracted, and the Balaam-state became developed, and man ran greedily after error for reward. But the Jezebel-state is worse even than that, and most significant of the bloody and idolatrous prophetess who sought to be universal mistress in the so-called dark ages, and dark indeed they were! Of this I believe the church in Thyatira to be the remarkable foreshadowing.

But the Lord loves to praise what He can, and it is in a dreary time that He is glad to be able to approve of the least good. Here in the growing darkness of the public state, there was growing devotedness among the real saints. "I know thy works, and love, and faith, and service, (for this is the true order,) and thy patience, and thy last works [to be] more than the first" (ver. 19). "And thy works" ought to be left out, and the

clause following should be, "and thy last works," &c., on ample authority, which the sense, I think, fully confirms to a spiritual mind. "But I have against thee that thou sufferest the woman [or, thy wife] Jezebel that calleth herself a prophetess; and she teacheth and deceiveth my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols." Thus there was much energy and devoted service; but withal the greatest evil threatened them or even then was at work.

When Jezebel sat as a queen in Israel, all was ruin and confusion; but the Lord did not fail to raise up a suited witness for Himself. It was then that we find an Elijah and an Elisha, and even another where naturally one might least expect it—in the very house where evil was paramount. There was he who gave refuge and food to the persecuted prophets of the Lord. Just as in the New Testament we hear of saints chiefly to be saluted who were of Cesar's household, so of old there was an Obadiah, who feared the Lord greatly, over the house of Ahab "which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up." It was then too was found the remnant of 7000, who had not bowed the knee to Baal. I think the Lord would have said of that remnant what we have in the epistle to Thyatira—"thy last works more than the first." The wickedness of those who surrounded them made their faithfulness more precious to the Lord; and He praises them more, perhaps, we may add, than if they had lived in a day less trying; just as, on the other hand, He cannot but deal most sternly with evil, which is done in a day of special light and mercy. How many

Ananias and Sapphiras have there been since Pentecostal times, who have not been visited in the same open and unsparing way as when great grace was upon all ! This is an encouragement to us who know ourselves to be exposed, not indeed to a storm of persecution, but to a season far more perilous. There never was a time when man thought better of himself; and this is so much the graver sin, inasmuch as the testimony of God's truth to the contrary has been widely spread abroad. I do not deny that it is a day of no small effort among Christians. But "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams;" and never has there been less subjection to the will of God than at this moment. There is much association, which sounds well,—much taking counsel together; but confederacy is one thing, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit is another and widely different thing. But the Lord says, "to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and trembleth at my word." The matter of real weight is not getting Christians together, even if they were all Christians, but together in the Lord's way and for the Lord's glory as their object—the "one thing" they have to do. If but two or three are thus gathered unto His name, we have His own assurance that His power and blessing will be there, spite of all appearances to the contrary. Had we two or three thousand together, but not in immediate subjection to the Lord Jesus, we should have only shame and sorrow in the end, however it might look for awhile. If we are seeking to please men, so far we cannot be the servants of Christ.

It was, then, it seems to me, when the Lord has before His eye the state of a church which might well prefigure the dark development of an after-day, (when the saints should be in great bondage, and that which was altogether alien in the midst persecuting them, and His own authority null in practice,) that He brings out His title of "Son of God," whose eyes were as a flame of fire and His feet like burnished brass. Peter of old had confessed Him to be the Christ, the Son of the living God; and thereon the Lord, immediately after pronouncing him blessed and emphatically naming him by the new name He had given, adds, "upon this rock I will build my church." Now, alas! the Lord anticipates that the professing church would lose its balance and set itself up virtually in His own place, giving out that she, the lady, "which calleth herself a prophetess," was to be heard in matters of faith, not He, the Lord. Here then we have the assertion of His personal glory and the attributes of His all-searching and unbending judgment of men—a serious but comforting thought for His own people, who might be in the midst of this sad confusion, and the perfect provision of His wisdom to deliver them from what was setting or set in. They would need and enjoy the immutable foundation, the Son of God, and the assurance that His church built on that rock could not fail, when public appearances were against it as against Himself in Israel. They were worse than nothing in the eyes of their persecutors; they were precious in Christ. It was a severer trial than from Jews or heathens; but the Son of God was no heedless spectator of all. So, too, His promise (26, 27) ought

to guard them from seeking a present kingdom, a so-called spiritual millennium without Christ, where they should be either free to enjoy the world or entitled to govern it as yet.

In the church at Thyatira there were faithful and loving souls, earnest too, especially in good works; but there was this plague spot also—the sufferance of “that woman Jezebel.” Jezebel, as we are told here, was a false prophetess, who was teaching and deceiving *Christ’s servants* to commit fornication and eat idol sacrifices. This was worse than the iniquity of him who loved the wages of unrighteousness, a step farther even in Balaam’s line. “And I gave her space to repent and she is not willing to repent of her fornication. Behold, I cast her into a bed, and those that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of *her works*. And I will kill her children with death, and all the churches will know that I am he that searcheth the reins and hearts, and I will give to you, each one, according to *your works*,” (verses 21-23).

What could be more shocking than the evil here foreshown! Jezebel, as all knew, was one who added violence to corruption, the counsellor of blood, the active hater of all God’s witnesses, the patroness in private and public of the idolatrous priests and prophets of Baal. And now, in Thyatira, there was that which intimated to the Lord’s eye the dark and cruel idolatry which was to be formally taught and imposed by a pretended infallible authority within the bosom of the professing church. Even now the actual germ could not be hid from Him whose eyes were as a flame of

fire. Jezebel was there and "her children" too. It was a deep and lasting source of evil. But the judgment of her and of all that sprang from her was severe, however it might seem to linger. The Lord discerns different degrees of connexion; but none should go unpunished, let Christendom decide as they might that evil must be allowed under His adored name. Repentance was absolutely refused, though the Lord had given ample space for it. "Fornication" (for such is the figure used) was both taught and practised. Long patience on His part is the sure sign, both that the object to be judged was in a thoroughly evil condition, (else He comes quickly in the jealous care of true love that counts on a true answer), and that when the judgment comes, it must be definitive and unsparing. "The woman," it has been long remarked, symbolizes the general state, as "the man" has the place of responsible activity.

The words "a few things," in verse 20, must disappear. It was not a little complaint, but one of unusual gravity and complication. The phrase crept in, I conceive, from verse 14, as there is otherwise resemblance enough to suggest such an assimilation to a copyist. But on a closer inspection the difference, as we have seen, is great, especially if we are to read "*thy wife* Jezebel." The sin of fornication or adultery here is symbolical of that wicked commerce with the world, which is in the same relation to the Christian or the Church, as intermarriage with a Canaanite would have been to an Israelite. To eat idol-sacrifices sets forth communion with what had a direct link with the power of Satan, for "the things which the Gentiles

sacrifice they sacrifice to devils, and not to God;" and it is an easy thing, little as men may think it or Christians may estimate aright its enormity, to have fellowship with devils.

Besides the leading corruptress and fountain-head of the mischief, we have two classes of persons mentioned who were guilty in a positive way. There were Christ's servants whom she deceived to illicit commerce with the world, and there were others who were the immediate offspring of Jezebel, "her children." With each one the Lord would deal according to his works. He was the righteous Judge, and man, as such, must be judged, and all, saints or sinners, must be manifested before His judgment-seat. Yet it is remarkable how the Lord avoids saying that the *saints* will be *judged*. "I will give," says He, "to you, each one according to your works;" and so in chap. xxii. 12, and many similar scriptures. On the one hand, we are positively told that the believer shall not come into judgment (for John v. 24 means judgment, and not "condemnation," however certainly this is the result of it). On the other hand, we know from Rev. xx. 12, 13, that the wicked are to stand before the throne, and to be judged, each one according to their works. Their resurrection is one of *judgment*, (and in effect, of condemnation,) contrasted with that of the righteous, which is a life-resurrection. Thus, it is certain that, if put on my trial for salvation or perdition, according as my works deserve, I *must* be lost, for I have sinned and have sin; yet is it equally sure that the Lord is not unrighteous to forget the work and labour of love,

and so He will give to each one according to his works. Christ Himself, Christ's love, is the only right motive for a Christian in anything; but there are rewards for those who have suffered for Christ and been cast out for righteousness' or for His name's sake.

The remnant comes out with great clearness in the next verse. "But unto you I say, the rest (or "remnant;" omitting the words "and unto," which have no right to be here) in Thyatira." (Ver. 24.) Here we have a faithful few, who are called "the rest," distinguished from the mass in Thyatira. The Lord had been speaking of His servants who had been seduced to dally with the evil of Jezebel, and of her own children, for which last class there was to be no mercy from Him. Then another class is addressed, the remnant, or "you that remain." The corrupt exterior body goes on, and there is a remnant that the Lord now had specially in view. He supposes them to be ignorant of what Christendom then counted knowledge, and only says, "whosoever have not this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, (as they speak,) I put upon you no other burden, but that which ye have, hold fast till I come." (Verses 24, 25.) These "depths of Satan" they had not known. They valued no knowledge which undermined the call to holiness. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and this beginning they feared to let slip; and they were right. It might be but negative; but they had kept clear of a great evil, and holding their little fast, they would surely have their reward when the Lord comes. There were those who suffered much for Christ, who witnessed for Him in these dark ages. Such were the

Albigenses and Waldenses; and “you, the rest in Thyatira,” I take to refer to these persecuted companies, who held tenaciously what they had from God. They did not know much, but they were a remnant separated in conscience and suffering from the evil around them, from Jezebel. Their comfort lies in no promise of amendment in the Church, but in a hope outside all on earth, even the kingdom and coming of Christ in person. Meanwhile they are called to overcome and keep Christ’s works unto the end.

There could not be a more admirable sketch in a few words than what we have here. And it is not a little remarkable that the book of the Revelation was much prized by these saints. Indeed, this has always been more or less the case in times of persecution—not that it is the best motive, for the book is valued most when the Lord leads His people to wait for His return. But His tenderness to His sufferers in a dark day is most sweet; and what a promise!—“And he that overcometh, and he that keepeth *my* works until the end, I will give him authority over the nations,” &c. (Ver. 26, 27.) What the mediæval church arrogantly and wickedly sought, the saints she persecuted or despised are yet to possess in the coming and kingdom of their Lord, and these hopes accordingly are here brought in as theirs suited objects. The guilty church was not more cruel towards the true saints than ambitious of power over the world. Things ecclesiastical had got to their grossest point. But it is good to wait for the Lord’s way and time: *He* is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. When the earthly power has been put aside and judged, those who have suffered with Christ shall

reign with Him. But He adds more than authority over the nations, and ruling them with a rod of iron as Christ also received of His Father. "And I will give him the morning star." (Ver. 28.) This is most blessed: not merely association with Christ in the day of His power, when the stronghold of men shall be broken to shivers, like the vessels of a potter, but "gathering together unto Him" before that day. The hope abides in all its fulness, and as fresh as at the first. Christ only could so speak and act.

The sun, when it rises, summons man to his busy toil, but the morning-star shines for those only who sleep not as do others—for those who watch as children of light and of the day. We shall be with Christ doubtless when the day of glory dawns upon the world; but the morning-star is before the day, and Christ not only says "*I am the bright and morning-star,*" but "*I will give the morning-star.*" He will come and receive His heavenly ones before they appear with Him in glory. May we be true to Him in the refusal of present ease, and honour, and power! May we follow Him, taking up our cross and denying ourselves daily! He will not forget us in His day, and He will give us, ere that comes, the morning-star.

I would here add, in closing this sketch of Rev. ii., that Thyatira has a sort of transitional place, being linked with the three preceding churches as on church-ground, whatever the corruption allowed which characterized its public state. On the other hand, it is connected with the three churches which follow on the ground of truth or testimony (not regularly ecclesias-

tical), both as being the first of those marked by the change of position in the call to hear, and as also expressly running down to the end. The others were transient phases. This begins the more permanent states in view of the Lord's advent. It may be noticed accordingly that the dealing after Thyatira, when threatened, falls on the angel: up to this it had been either on the candlestick, as in Ephesus, or on the evil-doers, as in Pergamos and Thyatira. Smyrna and Philadelphia have a special exemption, one in each of the two series. To the angel of the church in Sardis the word is, "I will come on *thee* as a thief;" when similar language was used in a former case, Christ said, "I will fight against *them*" &c., "I will cast her" and "I will kill her children," &c. In the latter series it is a question of a separated witness in Christendom, where fidelity is everything, as with the disciples in the gospel. Judgment must fall on the whole, though not without distinguishing the true-hearted. In this new part (with a slight exception in Sardis, which is necessary and only proves the rule), the titles of Christ are distinct from those seen in the opening vision of chap. i., and point to His future reign. This is seen with special emphasis in Laodicea, so that "the things that are" may vanish away thenceforth, as in fact they do.

CHAPTER III.

SARDIS.

Ver. 1—6. I think that any discerning reader must perceive that we are entering upon an entirely new order of things in this chapter, or, at least, a sort of fresh start. What was described in the vision of Christ walking in the midst of the candlesticks is not here as in chap. ii., unless it be the “seven stars,” no longer, however, held in His right hand. It is quite true that what we have been looking at, in the former chapter, may still exist and be verified at the same time with new features as they are brought out here. Not only may there be points morally like what we have seen in Ephesus, Smyrna, or Pergamos, but a continuing public state like the evil depicted in the message to the angel of the assembly in Thyatira, which goes on to the end in a way that differs from its predecessors. We find in Sardis another condition, and one which answers to the general state of Protestantism after the Reformation. We have not so much open evil, like idolatry and the other horrors that have been described before; but now we have a more correct outward form and orthodox aspect of things. As the four churches in the second chapter follow on consecutively, and describe the state of things before the rise of Luther, &c., so Sardis describes what followed the Reformation, when the glow and fervour of truth and the first flush of blessing had passed away, and a cold formalism had set in.



The way in which the Lord presents Himself is wonderfully suitable. "These things saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars." (ver. 1). This is a new point of view in which to see Christ. In chap. i. "the seven Spirits" were distinct from His person and connected with the throne. The seven Spirits of God refer to the Holy Spirit of God, viewed in His various perfections and the ways in which He works; and this not so much in the church, as towards the world. In chap. v., when the churches are done with, the Lord Jesus is described symbolically as a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth—the Holy Ghost as acting with a view to the government of the earth. It is not the Holy Ghost in all the fulness of the blessing into which He brought the Church in its unity, or dwelling there. It is the expression of the Spirit in fulness of quality and power to make good God's will on earth.

But whatever might be the condition of the church, the Lord Jesus was the One who had all the power of the Spirit of God, and He only is the One who has at the same time full spiritual authority. There were no two things more separated than these at the time of the Reformation. There was then a large body calling itself the church, which claimed the power of settling everything, as being the spouse of Christ; and then the claim of infallibility was strongly advanced, because, of course, those who assume irresponsible authority as Christ's vicar to settle the affairs of the church, to define doctrine, &c., ought to be infallible. This body had wrought for ages, gathering influence for itself; and at

last the struggle came, and it was proved to be a mass of the greatest evil against God and His Son that had ever been congregated on the earth. There might have been true saints of God in it at the worst of times, and I think that some, such as Cyprian, had even helped to give it an undue and false place of authority. Then, again, St. Bernard sanctioned the persecutions of the Waldenses. But it is well to bear in mind that there cannot be a greater fallacy than to abide in what is wrong merely because we find true saints of God there; for the great aim of Satan is to try and get good people to do bad things. When at last the crisis arrived, and men rose up in a considerable part of the world against this frightful evil, there was the separation of these two thoughts of ecclesiastical authority and spiritual power. Instead of its being a body that claimed both, everything ran into disorder, and men fell back on the power of the world, in order to gain freedom from the dominion of the pope.

Thus Protestantism was always wrong, ecclesiastically, from the very beginning, because it looked up to the civil ruler as the one in whose hand ecclesiastical authority was vested; so that if the church had been under popery the ruler of the world, the world now became, in Protestantism, the ruler of the church. It is not a question of church and state—that politicians may discuss; but it is a great deal too narrow and low a question for a Christian. The great thing is to be in the path of Christ, giving honour to Him. “I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.” This describes the cold and formal ways of religion that were found after the Reformation among

those that were not really Christians. The Lord Jesus shows what He disapproves of in Protestantism. Why not be thoroughly Christians? It was a poor thing to boast of not being as bad as Jezebel; it was death, if not abomination.

In Protestant lands, there has always been a measure of liberty of conscience. But the object of God is not merely to deliver either from gross evils, or from mere details, but that the soul should be right with God, and should allow the Lord to have His way and glory—liberty for the Lord to work by the Holy Ghost according to *His* will. When He is allowed His right place, there is the blessed fruit of it in love and holy liberty. It is not a human liberty derived from the power of the world that we want, (though God forbid that we should speak a word against the powers that be in their sphere,) but the liberty of the Holy Ghost. It is the sin of Christians to have put the powers that be in a false position. The Lord Jesus touches the root of the whole matter in the way in which He presents Himself to the church of Sardis. Whether it is spiritual power or the outward authority flowing from it, the Lord claims it all as belonging to Him. In Ephesus it was said that He held the seven stars in His right hand; but here are united the two things, inward spiritual power, and outward authority. He *hath* the Spirits of God and the stars. It is not said here that He holds the stars in His right hand, but that they are His, as well as the fulness of spiritual competency.

In the great mass of Protestant churches they gave up, as it were, the regulation of the stars into the hands of the powers that be. On the other hand, the persons

who revolted from that fell into the sad evil of suffering the church to have the stars in its own keeping. There is not such a doctrine in the whole scripture as either the world or the church having this kind of authority in its own hands. The Lord Jesus has still all under Himself. He has not given it up. Therefore let the Church only own what He is, and He will act accordingly. When there is faith to look to Him in His place as Head of the Church, He will assuredly supply every need. If He listens to the simplest cry of His lambs, does He not enter into the deeper need of the church, which is always His most beloved object? He took His Headship of the church only in heavenly glory, and He went there not merely to *be*, but to *act*, as the Head. What is His function as Head of the Church? He exercises authority, having persons to act under Him here below. Thus the existence of rule and gift in the Church of God is the result; and these are not touched by the ruin of the Church. The Lord, anticipating the time when there would be a revolt from under the spurious authority of the body calling itself the church, and foreseeing all the confusion that would be the result, presents Himself as the One who is superior to it all. Whatever may be the condition of things here, strength is in Christ: and we can never find strength in looking at the condition of the church, but at Christ.

When the apostles were here below, they were empowered to act for Christ in a very special way; but when they were taken away, the real source of the power in which they had acted, subordinately to Christ, was not dried up; the Lord Jesus has it all in His own

keeping still. There was a name to live, but real death. He was speaking of their condition as a body, and not as individuals. "Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die: for I have not found thy *works* perfect [filled up] before my God." Here we have again a very striking feature of what took place in Protestantism. In the desire to escape from the abuse of works by the Romish system, it is evident that its practice lost its due place in the minds of Christians—its place for those who have been brought nigh to God, for God does look for a real separate and distinct path to be taken by His people; and He finds fault with Sardis because of their failure in this. The saints of God, even in Thyatira, were commended of God for their earnestness, in spite of all the evil. *Their* last works were more than the first. Protestantism has weakened the idea of obedience, under the plea of "no perfection," either in the church or in the individual. Thus there has been a lowering of the just criterion wherever Protestantism has prevailed: but our God looks for perfection as the standard His children should judge themselves by—I do not say attain. He has grace to meet failures; but it is quite another thing for persons to settle down in self-complacency, from not having the divine standard before their eyes. The Lord always goes back to this.

It is better, in seeking to have that standard before us, to fail in carrying it out, than to succeed ever so much, if we gave it up. For what does the Lord most value? The heart that wants to please *Him*. The child may come to its father and say, "See what a pretty thing I have been making;" but if the parent

had told him to do something else, he would ask the child, "Is that what I desired you to do?" The Lord has His own will, which meets us in our first need as sinners awakened, and is the source of our very salvation. But it is far from the natural thought of the heart, which does not like subjection to another's will. It is but part of the lie of the enemy. The will of God was evidently that which accomplished our sanctification, through Him who said, "Lo, I come to do thy will." In Rom. x. the apostle puts our part of the matter in contrast with Jewish feeling. They thought, if they accomplished as much of the law as they could, that God was merciful, and would make up the rest; but the apostle shows that subjection to the righteousness of God is salvation. God's will is the very spring and power of our blessing, not only in the matter of forgiveness, but all the way through. Take God's ways in the church. These were subjects that were particularly neglected at the Reformation. Individual truth, such as justification by faith, was brought out forcibly and over a large field. But this was made the great point and aim of everything, and the consequence was, that people never knew thoroughly they were justified. The moment I make my own blessing the one or chief thing I am looking for in the Bible, I shall never know anything aright; but when God's thoughts and objects become my aim, I shall know directly that I am saved and blessed indeed. I cannot look at the cross of Christ without seeing, at the same time, my utter ruin, and my complete deliverance in the resurrection. If a man hesitates whether he is so very bad as God declares, he has to wait before he

enjoys the riches of His grace; but if I trust myself unhesitatingly in God's hands, there is not a blessing that does not flow out to me. We find ourselves to be as bad or worse than Israel, and then we are brought inside a circle of goodness and mercy superior to any thing they ever possessed.

At the Reformation, all this was comparatively lost sight of; and in escaping from the fearful net of Popery, they fell into the sin of putting church power into the hand of the civil magistrate. Others, again, who avoided this evil, made what they considered a true church to be the depository of this power; whereas it is Christ Himself still working by the Holy Ghost, that maintains His own lordship, a truth which is taught, at large, in the epistles. Supposing a person labours as a pastor or a teacher, from what authority is he to act? There was, indeed, human appointment of those who had to do with local matters; yet wherever it was a question simply of ministry in the word, there was no appointment from the first. Even in the case of choosing a successor to the vacant seat of Judas, the apostles did not themselves elect, but threw it out of their own hands into those of the Lord. (Acts i.) And when the Lord afterwards chose another apostle, we find "one Ananias," indeed, sent to baptize him, but there was no idea of that disciple, or any one else, making him an apostle. In what we have afterwards (Acts xiii.) i.e. the case of hands being laid on the apostles Paul and Barnabas, it was not a bestowal of any orders or mission, for it was done by men inferior to themselves in point of spiritual gift and power, but was simply their brethren commending

them to the Lord before they set out on a particular missionary tour to the Gentiles. We have a right to look for the Lord to maintain His authority in the church. In all ages, we find He was helping His blessed people, and doing His work by His servants. If a person wants to preach, he naturally thinks he must have the warrant of some authority; but if we seek an authority at all, we should have a competent one. Although there may be more respectability in the world, where these outward credentials, are looked for, the question rises, Has the Lord required authority to validate a person's preaching the gospel? The apostles *did* appoint elders and deacons; but these might be preachers and teachers, or they might not be: their being deacons was another thing altogether. Philip was a preacher of the gospel, but this depended upon his having a gift from the Christ as the head of the church, and not on his being one of "the seven." Men have slipped into habitual departure from God's principles; and this is called "order," because it is the most prevalent custom now in the professing church. And thus when we give up true principles, we get into wrong practice. The Lord attaches great importance to our owning Him as the One who has all power and authority in His own hands. The moment I own this, it so much the more binds my conscience. If I know a thing to be wrong, my conscience is held to it. I may not be able to see at once what is the right path to take; but to cease from what is evil is evidently the first step, and it is imperative.

The connexion between the end of the second verse ("I have not found thy works perfect before God")

and what follows ("Remember therefore, how thou hast received and heard," &c.) is to be remarked. He recalls them to what they had received from God Himself at the first. No such thought is allowed as that because things are not as they were then, therefore every church has a right to form its own laws. If it would be downright rebellion to say, because the Queen does not live in Ireland, that therefore the Irish people were at liberty to make what laws they pleased, it is as bad or worse if we think that, because things are changed, the apostles gone, and confusion come into the church, men are left free to desert the word of Christ and do their own wills: the Lord has left us *His*. The very word of God which tells me what I once was, but that I am washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God, this same portion enters into all questions of the assembly, and the working of the Holy Ghost in it by whom He will. (1 Cor.) There may be no tongues, or gifts of miracles, and healings; but is the Holy Ghost here? What He continues to do is according to the same principle and presence as at first, though in a very different measure of power, else we have no divine rule in these things.

Remark that the Lord's coming is spoken of just in the way it was threatened on the world (See 1 Thes. v). "If, therefore, thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief," &c. (ver. 3.) He would come upon them when they were not aware—suddenly and unwelcome. Had they not got into the world? Let them then beware of the portion of the world. If you have taken the world's ease, you must needs dread the

world's judgment. Such is not the way in which the Lord speaks of His coming to the Church. In reality and all the extent of the words, it will be upon the professing mass, and not upon real believers, that the Lord will come as a thief. "But thou hast a few names in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment." (Verses 4, 5.) The Lord brings in this suited comfort, that, as they had sought to act faithfully on earth, they should walk with Him in white. As they had walked in purity here below, they should appear in full justification of their ways before God above. But this is spoken of individually. The state of the Church as a whole was evidently low and worldly, and as such it should be judged. The moment a person ascertains that his association is contrary to the word, he should feel how grave that fact is, and consider what is due to the Lord. It might seem incredible, if one did not know the fact, that there have been and are men of God, guides of the flock, who not only abide in evil which they know, but seek to find a palliative in the circumstances of a righteous Asa or a godly Jehoshaphat, who nevertheless did *not* remove the high places. Alas! that the solemn revelations of God should be thus perverted so as to serve the ends of the enemy, and that a repeated warning should be tortured into a justification of sin. "The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thy eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed, therefore, that the

light which is in thee be not darkness." It is not enough to correct thoughts, and rest there; but if the Lord has given a judgment, is it not in order that the walk may be correspondent? Satan contrives to make the path of the Lord appear dark and sad; as he clothes a worldly course with the semblance of humility, order, and the like. But the word makes all plain now, as power will by and by even to the world.

May we walk with the Lord now, and surely we shall walk with Him in white hereafter! Instead of a blotted name, ours He will confess before His Father and the holy angels.

PHILADELPHIA.

The tone of the epistle to Philadelphia must, I think, confirm the idea presented as to Sardis, that in this portion (Rev. iii.) we have not so much the early church, or that of the middle ages, but what is found, or is developed, in modern times. Sardis is the beginning of this: a state of things not marked by flagrant evil, but by one sad and fatal characteristic—*it is negative*. Any fair persons, who have thought deeply on what is called Protestantism, must know that this is the sorrowful thing which we, who have been Protestants and thus share its shame, have to acknowledge. Men stand up too much, at least too self-complacently, for certain controversial points, which hide, in a great measure, their own wants and failures; they pride themselves on keeping apart from certain evils, such as the supremacy of the pope, the infallible authority of the church, the worship of the Virgin, saints, and angels, the doctrine of the mass, purgatory,

&c. Supposing that there were all orthodoxy as to these, there might be a thousand evils of another character; and together with outward correctness, the heart be thoroughly away from the love and honour of the Lord. This is precisely what we saw in Sardis—a name to live, but yet dead. As in Israel, when the Lord was on earth, the old idolatry had passed away, the unclean spirit had left the house, and had not returned; so the swept and garnished condition of the house answers to that which follows the Reformation. But we must distinguish between that and the work which God gave the Reformers to do. Let none speak disparagingly of these men, whether Luther or others. But while God was working in that great movement, it would have been better and holier if they had left earthly governments to their own proper functions. No doubt, their patrons spared them persecutions and secured them honours, which, instead of helping God's work on, proved a great hindrance. And so, when the fervour of first zeal had passed away, the state of things corresponds with Sardis.

In Philadelphia, we have something totally different. The first thing that strikes us is not what the Lord does or has, but what the Lord *is Himself*. If there is anything that delivers from mere dogma, with all its chilling influences, it is, I apprehend, the person of the Lord appreciated in any special way. And this I see in the epistle to Philadelphia. The Lord here presents Himself personally more than in any other of these epistles. It is true He is said to have the key of David; but before anything appears about this, He says that He *is* the Holy One and the True. In the

other epistles we do not find the Lord characterised in the same moral point of view. This is, in my opinion, what the Lord has been working in God's children during late years. The impulse given to evangelization by the spread of Bibles and missionary efforts has marked it outwardly ; but inwardly the sense of ruin has been used of the Spirit to lead the saints to the word, and hence to a fuller appreciation of the person of Christ—the only object in which we can rest, through the Holy Ghost, as He was God the Father's when He walked on earth.

There is something very beautiful in the way in which the grace of the Lord operates, after the epistle to Sardis, which was in a dead worldly state Christ made *Himself* known ; and He is the resurrection and the life. And what can give new life, put the church in its proper attitude, or bring a remnant to the walk and sentiments which become a time of ruin, but the Lord presenting Himself personally ? This is characteristic of John's gospel ; the person of Christ in His rights, not only humbling Himself to death, but baptizing with the Holy Ghost, in the activity of gracious power which is suitable to His glory. The first portion of it brings His person before us ; the second, the other Comforter, whom the absent Lord was to send down from heaven. It is beautiful thus to see the place that John's gospel has in the scriptures of God. It was written very late, the last of all the gospels, and suited to a day of declension. There is no question of Jerusalem or of the Jews, as the immediate object of God, even in the way of testimony. They are noticed as a people outside, whom God has noth-

ing to do with for the time. Hence the Lord speaks of the passover as a "feast of the Jews," &c. In Matthew, on the contrary, there is the recognition of Israel for the truth of God. The boar out of the wood may waste, and the beast devour, but it is Israel's land still; and Jerusalem is called the holy city, even in connection with Christ's death and resurrection. In John all that is at an end. Not only had Jerusalem and the Jews forfeited all claim upon God, having departed from Him as Jehovah, and the law and the prophets, but they had rejected Christ; yea, and when the Holy Ghost came, they rejected Him too, and would not listen to Him any more; so that there was no resource. God had manifested Himself in every possible way. No manifestation of God, where man was under law, could do any good. *Individuals* laid hold of God's grace all through, but the *nation* was under law. The gospel of John starts from this point, that all was darkness, and there the True Light shines though the darkness comprehends it not. In *Him* was life. This ever remains true, though He may deal judicially here.

But to return to these churches. There had been declension from first love, suffering from heathen power, Satan tempting through the power of the world, Jezebel seducing to idolatry, and, in short, every kind of evil commerce with the world, with persecution. But now we find a modern state—outward cleanness, but the heart given up to itself. (See 2 Tim. iii.) Sardis gives us this picture: some walking purely, but there was no such thing as the heart thoroughly subjected to the Lord. *But will He be content with this? The Lord must raise*

up a witness for Himself; and the only way whereby He makes a person an adequate witness for Himself is by presenting *Himself* to the affections. The moment we see the Lord Himself, there is strength to serve Him with gladness.

Here the Lord, disgusted with the state of Sardis, comes, as it were, saying, "I want to have the heart—I must have it." He removes the veil, brought in through the sin of the professing Church. When they see that blessed One, so to speak, a little nearer, there is a state that answers (but oh! how feebly) to His desires for their heart, and it will be made good without fail, when we shall see Him as He is.

"Thou hast a little strength." It is not the way of God to produce great strength at a time of general ruin. At the era of the return from the Babylonish captivity, the Lord wrought in great grace. There was no outward power; on the contrary, they were so apparently contemptible, that it was the taunt of their enemies, that a fox could jump over their wall. But we find the same sort of spirit as in Philadelphia. They build no fortification to keep out the Samaritans, (the Lord was a wall of fire round about them,) but the *first* thing they erect is an altar to Him. *The Lord* was the first object of their hearts. If *He* was their wall, they could afford to wait before building another. There was no such thing as the angel smiting the first-born, no miracle wrought on their behalf, not a word about plagues on their enemies; but "my Spirit remaineth among you, fear ye not." Whenever Israel were afraid of their adversaries, they had no strength; but *in looking to the Lord*, they forgot enemies. *When*

we lean on Him now, it strikes more terror into the hearts of those who are against Him that anything else. When the heart is true to the Lord, *that* tells upon the conscience of others. What joy that the Lord's heart was towards them ! It is this which produces proper feelings towards Him and towards one another. The very name of this Church is significant of the relationship which He had established ; but it is also important to remember that it is a *holy* relationship we bear to one another. While it is certain that those who care for one another's heavenly interest will not be careless otherwise, still the Church is not a club, where men may be ready to help on each other, right or wrong. This would be Chartism or any thing rather than the brotherhood of the Lord. The first words are the key to the whole. "He that is holy, he that is true (ver. 7)." Look at the first epistle of John. The expression is not often used about the Lord, but we find it there. In the second chapter of that epistle, speaking to the little ones of the family of God, it is written, "Ye have an unction from the HOLY One, and ye know all things." He that is holy, He that is true, has all for them. There might be weakness, but He has the key of David. In the genealogy of our Lord in Matthew, we find the expression, David "*the king*," not *Solomon* the king, or any other ; because David is the person who first characterized royalty in Israel. He was the man according to God's own heart. And as for David walking in faith, no difficulties could stand in his way. True, the type was imperfect—no type is perfect, because it is not Christ, though it may *be a witness of Him*. We see the failure of the man ;

but where the power of God wrought in David what was bright, and blessed, and good, we have the germ, as it were, of that which we see fully in the Lord. The "key of David" represents administrative power, the means of access to whatever he possessed. Thus it is said, (Isa. xxii.) "the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open and none shall shut," &c. This was the consequence; he who had it had all things under his hand; and it was his business to take care of everything.

The Lord presents Himself as having the key of David. Therefore they ought not to look to the power of the world, nor to man; for if *He* had the key, it was the very thing they wanted. The energy of man might be at work all around, Jezebel, false prophets, &c.; but there was this Blessed One, the holy and true; and so much the more needed, because they were weak. They had so little strength that, perhaps, they could not even open the door, but He says that He had opened it for them; He had brought them into a large place where there was no such thing as bondage, or constraint. It is plain that the Lord is here marked according to what He is personally and morally; not only as the great *source* of holiness and truth, but as the Holy One and the True. We find the latter also in the first epistle of John. "We are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ;" but there he goes farther still, "this is the true God and eternal life" Thus, then, we have the Lord's person brought before them: it was what they coveted. They valued Christ. They wished to know more of Him; and He knew their heart. So it is said, "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall

be full of light." They were tried of a mere form of godliness ; they knew it was as possible to be lost or to dishonour the Lord in orthodoxy as in the world. They turn to the Lord, and He presents Himself as the Holy One and the True ; not as against them, but full of tenderness and grace, putting before them an open door, and giving them the certainty that no man could shut it.

"Thou hast a little strength, and has kept my word, and hast not denied my name (ver. 8)." Here we have three expressions concerning them. They are in a state not marked by outward note, or strength. Like Himself, they are unknown to the world, but they had kept His word ; and more than this, they had not denied His name. Consider *what* it is to keep Christ's word. It is evident that there had been a departure from His word. It might have been circulated ; but had it been cherished ? Had it been loved and sought into, as for hid treasure ? Was it for this thing that men met together to pray and read—that they might understand it better ? What a movement in advance for the Church, where the Lord's person becomes more than ever the object, and the word as *His* word ! It is not mere evangelisation, blessed as that is in its place, and in its effect on the world. But here it is the inner circle of the saints who love, serve, adore Christ for Himself.

In this epistle we also find the great value of the name of the Lord Jesus. In 1 Cor. i. the address is not to the Corinthians alone, but "to all who in every place call upon" that name. In other words, the first epistle to the Corinthians is in no way, more than the second, of private application, but for all Christians everywhere.

In fact, the generalizing address is not put so strongly in any other; and this, perhaps, because the Spirit of God foresaw that, more than any other, it would be set aside. In these days, when there is no extraordinary manifestation of power, men might say, It is not for us, it belongs to a day that is bygone. True, there is no use to talk of regulating tongues, if you have not got them. But we have the Holy Ghost, and, blessed be God! the Church will never know the day when it will be without the Holy Ghost. Look at its darkest hour—the middle ages, Romanism, &c. The Holy Ghost was always there, not, indeed, justifying evil, or putting His seal upon disobedience, but He was there for the certainty of faith, according to the Lord's word, "He shall abide with you for ever." The idea of looking for the Holy Ghost to be poured out again *on us* is utterly wrong. Such is the Jewish hope. For the church to make such a petition is, in effect, to deny that it is the Church. It may be well for us to throw ourselves down before the Lord, and own that we have acted as though we had it not. But let us bless God that we have the Spirit, not only dwelling in individuals, but binding us together for an habitation of God. The *manifestation* of this is broken, it is true, but the fact remains; just as we say of a man whose circumstances are bad, that he is a ruined man, while the *man* still exists. This gives us ground for humbling ourselves the more; that the Church had the Spirit and yet went wrong. Men might say, If we had a Pentecost now, and the Holy Ghost sent down again, we should go right; but the fact is, that when they had the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, they declined and fell.

What God calls upon us to do is, not now to wait for fresh gifts of power, but to humble ourselves before Him, because we have gone, even as Christians, in the saddest opposition to His will. Alas! though the Holy Ghost dwelt there, one golden calf after another has been set up, till there is as much sin as was in Israel. This is what the Lord calls us to feel. The sympathies of the Philadelphian saints were with Him.

Clearly, then, what the Spirit presents is a despised company, but the word of Christ specially prized, and the Lord's name maintained. We have learned that the church is never bound to go on in sin. "Let him that nameth the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." There may be moral iniquity and worldly lusts; and what is there so bad as church iniquity, except that which is against the person of Christ Himself? If a man goes on with things against the outward order of the church, it is evil, but not to be compared with sin against the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is always the worst, and the test of souls. The first of all duties is that the heart should be true to Christ. God looks for it.

Here, then, we see Christ bringing Himself out personally to the church, and this not with a general expression of love, but manifesting a special attachment of His heart to them. Hence it is said, "I have loved them." The Lord loves all His people, but it is equally true that He has special affections. There may be a peculiar link between Him and saints at particular times of danger and trial. His grace removes the hindrances and makes it to be enjoyed in its strength. They know His place in glory, but that which touches

their hearts is that He loves them in all that glory. His love the great basis and spring of their love.

"Thou hast a little strength." I know you are weak; but you have "kept my word and not denied my name," See here the personal link—"my word." "*my name.*" The name of Christ, apprehended by the soul, is salvation. When the heart is brought down to submit to God's judgment of its sin, He Himself brings before that soul Christ's name; when it finds that it has no name in which to stand before God, He says, Here is a name, my Son's name. Faith supposes a man giving himself up as good for nothing, and saying, "God has been good to me, when I have been bad for Him." God has laid down this name as a foundation-stone for the poor sinner. It looks weak; it is called a "stumbling-stone," as it is to unbelief; but I ought to *believe* in it. If I merely *look* at the gospel, I am lost, because then I reason about it; but if I *believe* it, I am saved. What did Abraham do? He did not reason; he *considered not* his own body which was dead, but he gave glory to God. If he had felt strong, he might have given glory to himself. This is one practical aim that God works for, that we may know our own nothingness.

But is this the only use of Christ's name? No: He assembles round Himself. Jesus is the great object and attractive point to which the Holy Ghost gathers. Suppose it were the question of a person coming in, who holds what people call Calvinistic views, or Arminian, never having learnt fully the ruin of man; you may say, "We don't like to be troubled." But the test is, what does the Lord say? Has He no power to

judge that question? Has He delegated it to our discretion? The Lord has named *His* name over that saint, and I am therefore to receive him. Another comes and says, "I hear you receive all Christians; but I do not believe that Christ was exempt from the fall, either in His nature or in His relation to God." "No," I reply "you cannot use the name of *Christian* to dishonour *Christ*." But wherever a man is found humbly confessing the name of the Lord (whether he be churchman or dissenter, that is not the point), we are bound to receive him. It is sorrowful that the Church should have these names of variance: they will all be at an end by and by. But we must not gainsay the name of the Lord *now*. The Lord's name is there, and that is a passport all over the Church. It is no question of joining *us*; indeed he *is* joined to us if joined to Christ. True, the Lord has His servants; but we do not acknowledge any one as a centre in the church but Christ.

A further use of the name of the Lord is in discipline. What is the object of discipline? Not to keep up *our* character, but that His name should have its just place and honour, keeping it bright even where Satan's throne is. In the very camp of the enemy there is a name that cannot be put down. The Holy Ghost is there, not merely to give us comfort, but having delivered us from anxiety about our own sins, He leaves us free to care for Christ, and to serve Him. The question in the maintenance of discipline is, Is there departure from iniquity? The Lord never acknowledges anything as the church where iniquity is ~~sanctioned~~. There is a difference between sin detected

there, and the sanction of sin when detected. Any iniquity may break out: it did in the apostolic churches. The man was put away at Corinth because he *was* a Christian (as it is said, "that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus"). It might be thought, from the terrible nature of his sin, that he could *not* have been one. The Holy Ghost shows us thereby that if a Christian gets away from Christ, he is capable of anything except positively going against Christ Himself. From this I think the Holy Ghost would always keep; as in the case of Solomon's judgment, the false woman was determined at all events to have her half of the child, while the real mother would rather yield it than let its life be touched. But a Christian may fall into a cold state of feeling about Christ (unnatural as this may seem); and when in this state, so as not to have a just sense of the name of the Lord, what good can be got out of him? It was not so with the Philadelphian saints. They did not deny His name; and the Lord uses the tenderest expressions of love towards them. All ecclesiastical pretension, it has been well said, was against them. They were not looked on by those who said they were Jews. But He says of them, "I will make them come and worship before thy feet," &c. (Ver. 9.) They were in the midst of a great deal of profession that was hollow. But the Lord promises to vindicate them by His own power. What comfort there is in not seeking to vindicate ourselves, but in going on with the Lord!

It is of the utmost importance to see that the name of the Lord will never oblige a man to choose between *two evils*; and this is, in my judgment, what God has

been pressing of late. There *is* a path without evil. Not that the flesh of man may not bring in evil ; but if a man *persists* in any sin, you say he is not walking as a Christian ; he cannot be *owned* as a Christian, though we may pray for him. Again, take a company of Christians. Evil comes in. I cannot say, “these are not Christians.” No, but bring in the authority of the Lord’s name to put the evil away. He having absolute authority, it is ours to take the place of full subjection to Him. The Church belongs to God. If it were ours, we might make our own rules ; but woe be to the man that meddles with the Church of God, bringing in his own regulations ! This was, it would seem, what was felt by these Philadelphians. They valued the authority of the name of the Lord. They avowed that they were weak, but they knew that the power of Christ was strong enough to keep them. Why should they be afraid ? When Christians own His name as a gathering centre, it is not said that evil will not come in ; but looking to the power of the Lord Jesus and His Spirit, we do not mean to sanction evil. Let us only leave the door open for the Lord to come in. There may be much to try our patience ; but what we have to do is to wait on the Lord. This is what the Lord seeks—that we should have confidence in what He is and has, taking the place of weakness and dependence in prayer, however much we may be tried.

It is of great interest to note here the re-appearance of the Catholic system at this point. It had developed first in its fulness in the era of early heathen persecution, under the fathers so called (the Smyrna period—

compare chap. ii. 9.) Now, it comes up again, the enemy's counterfeit, the real antagonist of the testimony of God in our own day. But the Lord will compel them yet to recognise where the truth is, and where the Lord's approving love rests especially. "Behold I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie." (ver. 9.) These claimed to be exclusively the covenant people; others (in particular those meant by the assembly in Philadelphia) they regarded as outside, unworthy of a name save of contempt. For this it is which tries the saint, not persecution from open external enemies as also in Smyrna. The boasters in tradition, antiquity, priesthood, order, and ordinances, shall yet be forced to acknowledge those they despised as the beloved of the Lord. Fidelity to Him, however feeble, is precious in His eyes.

In Pergamos they kept His word: here they did more. "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I will keep thee from the hour of temptation" (ver. 10). In these churches the Lord evidently looks forward to a state of things up to the very close. It is plain that, as the hour of temptation is still future, room is left for the application of this promise to the end. This is not His word only but of His patience. Christ is coming to receive His Church, and afterwards to be the Judge of all the earth. But we are not looking for signs. God will graciously give signs to the Jews, but the church was never called to be guided in its thoughts by what it saw (like Thomas). "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." It was when the Lord was no longer seen that the

church was born into the world ; and since then the church is waiting, but was never meant to depend on outward tokens. It was when He took His place above as Head, that His body, the church, was formed ; for there could not be a body, except there were first a head. God would have the church waiting not for signs, but for Christ Himself. He will cause His voice to be heard, and the dead in Christ shall rise and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Christ is waiting for this patiently. As far as I have noticed, the Lord does not speak about His coming as if there were any haste connected with it. He waits patiently for it. He lingers in His love, that there may be a lengthening of mercy to the world, and that souls may be brought to Him. The Church knows that He is waiting, and is called to the same patience—to have fellowship with Him in *His* patience.

“I will keep thee *from* the hour of temptation (ver. 10).” This is not the portion of the Jews. To them, when the time of trial comes, God says, “Come, my people, enter into thy chambers” (Isaiah xxvi). Ours is the place of Abraham. He had not to fly to a little Zoar, like Lot who was saved indeed out of the judgment, but not much to his honour. The Lord had a heavenly-minded saint, as well as an earthly-minded one. Abraham was not in the sphere of that temptation at all. So the Church will be kept from the coming hour. This is our confidence—not merely preserved in or through it, but “from” it. Take another figure—that of the deluge. Enoch had been preserved *out of it* altogether, while Noah was carried through *the waters of the flood*. Thus God gives us blessed

witnesses from the beginning of this two-fold preservation, like Enoch and Abraham in spirit on the one hand, and on the other like Noah and Lot. These last were *in* the circumstances of the trial; and this will be the case with the converted remnant of Israel during the time of the dreadful judgments. The Christian's hope is to be with the Lord in heaven, and the church ought to be looking for it. And surely the cry is now going forth, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him." I ask you have you *gone out*? There were those who not only believed when they heard the cry, but went out. Have you left everything that is contrary to Him?—what *you* know—not what *I* know—to be contrary to Him? I ask whether you are ready to meet Him. If so, you need not be afraid. Be assured that anything your poor will wants to keep is not worth the pains. It is gain to go out from all to meet Him; it is joy to be in the path of His sorrow. Has that cry reached your heart? Do not be content with saying, "I have got oil in my vessel, and it does not matter where I am." This is selfish and unholy. The Lord grant that such may not be your feeling! He has saved me that I may think of Him. He wishes me to go out to meet Him—to value the precious hope of His coming. Are you then keeping His word? *You know*. This is a question between your own conscience and the Lord. When you have kept what you *do* know, you will learn more, and find it the truest liberty ever to serve Him.

"I am coming quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no one take thy crown (ver. 11)." This is a *precious* word. The Lord speaks of coming like a

thief (as e. g. to Sardis, which had taken the world as its mistress, and allowed the unpurged world to have the place of the Lord). Here He comes as one that has a crown to give. *The Lord Himself coming to meet us* is the jewel He has given us to keep. The Lord grant us to hold it fast, that it be not taken from us!

We are indeed weak now, but the Lord says, "If you are content to be weak now, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God." A pillar is the emblem of strength (that which supported the temple), contrasted with weakness. It is a hard thing to be content to be weak. To flesh it is comfortable to feel the world's strength under one. But if willing to look what we are now, the Lord tells us what He will do for us then: "I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God (ver. 12)." As I have known *My* God, I will bring you into fellowship with Me. You were content to wait for My coming, and none shall take your crown. For those who have thought of Christ now, Christ will provide all the joy He can give them then. The Lord grant that this may be our comfort while we wait for Him! We may for Christ be outside all that looks strong and orderly. In that day we shall go no more out but enjoy the most intimate association with Christ, be a pillar in the temple of His God, and have the name of His God and of the city of His God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and His new name inscribed on us.

Weak as these were, they took the place of weakness; and as they had thought of His word and of His name, the Lord says, When I have you in my temple, I will write upon you "my new name," and will make you *a* pillar "in the temple of my God." He does not

say the *throne*, which would be the expression of power, but the *temple*, which is another thought from the throne. The temple is the place of worship, where God is exalted in the beauty of holiness. Just so, when it was a question of the worship of God, David wears an ephod. His own wife despised him (she was looking at him as the son-in-law of her father Saul, the king) because he did not come out in some robe suitable to royalty: but David had the thought of God before him, and in his eyes it was his greatest possible exaltation to wear the ephod, and so to draw near to the Lord.

So in Philadelphia, they were specially those who entered into worship, because they appreciated the person and character of the Son of God. It is this that draws out the heart. Thus when Jesus revealed Himself as the Son of God (John ix.), the blind man worshipped Him. This is very little entered into, even by real children of God. A man might receive favour from God, and give thanks to God for it, but might know little of worship. This is a higher step and nearer to the Lord. It does not merely appreciate the favours that come down to us from God, but what the God is who gives them. Real worship is always this. The Father seeks worshippers, but it is to draw them back to the source from which the grace has flowed. Not that the *word* worship is used in the address to Philadelphia (except in ver. 9, where it is in quite a different sense, merely signifying that the men, who were now scorers, would have to humble themselves and give honour to those whom *they had despised*). Worship is the drawing near to

God in the appreciation not only of what He does, but of Himself. There is this that always prepares the way for worship—the full and simple knowledge of our being brought near to God, of the work of Christ and its blessed results for us.

LAODICEA.

Ver. 14—22. We have seen the strong contrast between the state of Sardis and the previous order of things. Gross corruption, open evil, persecution, hatred of the holiness and truth of God, false prophets had reigned in Thyatira, though there was a remnant found there, and a faithful remnant. If Thyatira represents the dark ages, when the Lord had His faithful saints hidden away in nooks and corners of the world, in Sardis we have a correct appearance of things—a name to live, and death almost universal; yet even in Sardis there were those who had not defiled their garments. If there is so marked a distinction between Sardis and Thyatira, there is an equally strong line of demarcation between Philadelphia and Laodicea.

“Unto the angel of the church *in* Laodicea,” not “*of* the Laodiceans.” (So as to Ephesus, it should be “the church *in* Ephesus.” Rev. ii. 1.)

Let us look at the character that God gives of this church, and what He brings to light of its condition. If there are two churches that stand in more pointed contrast to one another, it is just these last two. The reason, I think, is this; that when God works in any special way, when He puts forth His grace in some *new form* and light, it always, since the slipping aside of *Christendom*, draws in its train a peculiarly dark sha-

dow. So, here, Philadelphia was a bright picture. They were weak, but they were to be quite peaceful ; for the Lord had opened the door, and He would keep it open. Christ was all their confidence in contrast with the pretentious religionists who appear at the same time, claiming to be the people of God with no care for Christ. The church should have been by the Holy Spirit a real testimony to the new creation of which Christ is both the only source and the bright exemplar. But it had wholly failed and never so much as in this last phase. But when we come to look at Laodicea, what a difference we find ! There is no such thing as the Lord waiting upon their need, having the key of David, and presenting Himself as the object of their affections—as the holy and true One, in His moral grandeur, which called out all the heart to worship Him.

But now He speaks in another tone. “These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.” There was an end of proud profession at hand. He was the “Amen,” the only securer of divine promise, the solitary “faithful and true witness,” when all else had failed. This presentation of Himself supposes that those to whom He was writing were utterly faithless and had revived the old things which had been buried in the grave of Christ.

Job was not in the presence of God when he was thinking so much about himself. (“When the ear heard *me* and the eye saw *me*,” &c.) We may say he was in the presence of himself and not of God. It is always a poor sign if we see a man stop to look at *himself*, whether his good or his bad self. The Lord

does not want us to be dwelling on the change in ourselves. This is not to forget the things that are behind (which does not mean, by the way, our sins, but our progress). If the Lord has given us to take a step forward, it is that we may get nearer to Himself, and increase in the knowledge of God. Along with this there will always be increase in the knowledge of ourselves, but never in the way of self-admiration. As belonging to Christ, He is the object that happily keeps us low. When Job was really brought at the close into the presence of God, he was in the dust. He did not know what it was to be thoroughly worshipping God until he was brought there, when his eye saw Him. Before, he had been looking more at what God had produced in him, but now he saw himself to be *nothing*. After this we find him even praying for his friends, and we have burnt-offerings. This was the spirit of intercession, and worship too. It appears to me that such was the spirit into which the Philadelphian church had been brought. They understood worship, because they, in their measure, knew Him that was from the beginning. The Lord loves us to be strong in Christ, to be growing up into Him.

In Laodicea there was no such thought—nothing like entering into the riches of the Lord's grace. There is nothing we ought to feel our lack in so much as in worship, just because we do value it. It is spiritual feeling, though feeble indeed, that makes us alive to our little power of worship. Be assured that the spirit of worship is our true power for service. *Thus in John x.* the Lord says, "I am the door: by *me*, if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall

go in and out and find pasture." It is no longer the Jewish sheepfold and the bondage of the law, but perfect liberty, going in for worship and out for service, everywhere finding food and blessing. How sweet to think that the time is coming when we shall go in never to come out again! It will be always service in immediate connexion with the Lord Himself—enjoyment of the presence of God and of the Lamb—eternal worship. And let me again ask, for whom would this be a welcome and happy promise? For those who had valued and enjoyed worship here below; as in Ps. lxxxiv., "They shall be still praising thee." The place where the Lord dwelt was graven even in the hearts of those going there "in whose heart are the ways." They must get to the place where God was, and dwell there.

The Lord does not reveal Himself in the same personal and still less in an ecclesiastical way; but certain qualities and titles belonging to Him are taken up, which reach out from what He had been for God to that which links Him with the new scene in which He is about to be displayed as Head over all. This cannot fail. *He* was "the Amen," the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God. *They* had failed in everything—they had been unfaithful witnesses, and He as good as says to them, "You have not met a single thought of My heart. I will now present Myself to you as all you should have been." He was also "the beginning of the creation of God." (Ver. 14.) Christendom is at its beginning a rejected witness. Christ is in relationship with the new creation.

"I know thy works that thou art neither cold nor

hot." (Ver. 15.) This is latitudinarianism. It is not ignorance that makes a person latitudinarian, but the heart that remains indifferent to the truth, after the truth has been brought before it. Such an one does not want the truth, because he feels the sacrifice and the separation from the world, which must ensue if the truth be followed. We ought to bear, wherever there is unwilling simple-hearted ignorance; but indifference to truth is quite another thing, and hateful in the sight of the Lord.

Thus latitudinarianism is never the condition of souls that are simple-hearted but of those by whom the truth has been heard and who are not prepared for the cross. God's truth must put people's hearts to the test. It is not merely something I have to learn, but it *proves* me. If the sheep is in a healthy condition, it will hear the Shepherd's voice, and not even know the voice of strangers; but if the sheep departs after others, it becomes so confounded that it can scarce distinguish the Shepherd's voice. This arises in Laodicea, and, as it appears to me, from despising the testimony given in the former church. Laodicea is the fruit of the rejection of the testimony that formed Philadelphia. There He showed Himself, and to the heart that received Him He said, "As my name has been everything to you on the earth, so I will give to you My new name in time of glory. Every affection that has been true and blessed, that I have wrought in your hearts, shall come out more brightly in the glory." To Laodicea He says, "Thou art neither cold nor hot." They must have had some stimulant to warm them *as it was not absolute cold*. They were dishonest.

Laodicea is just the last state of things, which the Lord could not allow to go on any longer—a time when persons have had a great deal of truth in a certain fashion, but their hearts not touched by it. If the heart had been in ever so little a measure true, however ignorant, it would have enjoyed what had come from the Lord. In 1 John ii. the persons who are said to have an unction from the Holy One and to know all things, are not the “fathers” (who of course had been thus anointed also) but “the babes.” The ability to judge what is not of Christ depends upon the heart being true to Him. Hence the youngest saint, if single-eyed, can discern with certainty, where the theologian is lost in endless genealogies.

Every spirit that lowers and denies Christ (the Christ of God) is of antichrist. There were, there are now many antichrists, and the place to look for them is where He has been named. If Christ had not been known, there could not have been an antichrist, which was the dark shadow that followed the truth. If we have the Lord at work in this gracious way, we have Satan working too. To be “lukewarm” was to be false, with the pretension of the truth; and the Lord says, “I will spue thee out of my mouth.” There is not such a contemptuous expression used by Him anywhere else that I know. This is sensibly different from the dealing with Sardis, where the general judgment of Protestantism is given,—judged like the world: the Lord comes as a thief. Is this the way that *we* measure things? We should have said probably that Jezebel was to be felt most about; but would it have *struck us* that to be *lukewarm* was the worst of all?

But this was what drew forth all the Lord's indignation, and He only is wise.

"Because thou sayest I am rich and increased with goods," &c. (Ver. 16.) Here is a plain proof that they had heard a great deal about the truth. They thought themselves rich. Learning and intellectualism in religion they counted a prize. If these grow (at least in extent, even though not in depth), what ground for satisfaction? The spread of the outward knowledge of God is what hastens on the last crisis—God's final judgment and setting aside of all that bears His name falsely and self-complacently. They had sought man and the world, which promise much to the eye. But this is no righteous judgment; for nature thus allowed in the church is so much loss, to the utter exclusion of what is divine and heavenly—the real and bitter impoverishment unto all true riches. This the Lord proceeds next to lay before the angel.

Ver. 17. "And knowest not that thou art the wretched, and the miserable, and poor, and blind," &c. This was because they had rejected the testimony of God. His testimony always produces the sense of being nothing, but it never weakens confidence in Him. There may be tests,—the epistles of John are full of them; but there never is such a thing as the Spirit of God leading a person to *doubt* God's being for him. He may and surely will work in a person who is slipping aside from the Lord, to bring him back; He may make us feel our weakness; but it is not at all His way to produce a doubt in the soul; and it is ever a *sign of the flesh* being at work, "lusting against the *Spirit*," when we give way to distrust. The Spirit of

God always, wherever He is, aims at making a man thoroughly humble himself, judging and renouncing the folly of the flesh. There is, and must be, reality, and earnestness, and truthfulness in the presence of God. "*I am* rich, and am become rich, and have need of nothing." But we have the Spirit of God pronouncing this to be carnal presumption, the heart knowing not its need, and refusing grace. There had been momentary warmth, which made it so hateful to God. But this is just what men are doing who talk about the church of the future. The early times they call the infancy of the church; afterwards the church became a great naughty child: and now they are looking for a church of the future, when man will be no longer a subject, but will act for himself—will act like a man. Alas! where will not these aspirations end? for God will be left out of the so-called church altogether, and His authority got rid of.

This is working now extensively. And are God's children lukewarm about it? about God's truth being shut out? Remember what the Lord here says, "*I will spue thee out of my mouth.*" It would be a gross mistake to suppose that there were no Christians among them. But it is not a question of individuals, but of the assembly, and as such the Lord said He would spue them out of His mouth. People cannot congregate in large masses without Laodiceanism as the result, if it be not also the spring. There is no such thing as great power of the Spirit of God gathering people together at the present time. The Lord be thanked if there are a few gathered out to His name! *Let God's children remember that they must answer*

to the Lord Jesus Christ, whether they are represented by Laodicea or not ; whether they are standing for Christ, or for what merely bears the name of Christ, as a veil over indifferentism.

Yet the Lord does not give them up. He says, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire," &c. (Ver. 18.) Gold is used as the symbol of what is intrinsic righteousness in God's nature, or divine righteousness; and white raiment, or linen, stands for the righteousness of saints, as we see from chap. xix. Divine righteousness had slipped from their thoughts. They were neither appreciating the righteousness of God, which a Christian is made in Christ, nor the practical righteousness displayed before men, which the Spirit leads in. So He counsels them to buy of Him the true gold, and white raiment, that there might be the holiness that became them before others. "Anoint thine eye with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." There was the secret—the lack of unction from the Holy One. They did not see anything properly, not even their need of divine righteousness.

As many as I love I rebuke and chasten ; be zealous, therefore, and repent." (Ver. 19.) Depend upon it that this is the Lord's voice for the present moment. Here, alas ! it was what the Laodiceans needed. The Lord is dealing with His people: He constantly puts before them something to humble them in their thoughts of themselves: not telling them to do something or try something new, but calling them "to repent." He does not ask them to stretch their wings for some greater flight in the future, but to see where they are and to repent.

The call to repentance here, however, as in Sardis, differs greatly from that in the message to Ephesus and Pergamos, where all are thus urged, on penalty of the Lord's solemn chastening, whether general or special. Thyatira has here too an intermediate place: "I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not." Hence the threat of judgment follows, and the vast change ensues in all its extent.

It is a far higher thing to suffer for Christ and with Christ, than to be *doing* something. When the Apostle Paul asks, "What shall I do?" The Lord answers, "I shall show thee what great things thou must *suffer*," &c. This is what the Lord specially prizes—not our sufferings as men, but sufferings for Christ.

Here they were persons, as sunken as they were proud, called upon to be zealous and repent; to humble themselves before God on account of their condition. The Lord brings out a gracious word too, "Behold I stand at the door and knock." (Ver. 20.) Yet it is a solemn thing that the Lord should be there, thus taking the place of one outside. Nevertheless, He was ready to come in where He found a soul true to him. "If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him," &c. Need it be said that this is not an address to the world for them to be saved? In John x. the Lord presents Himself in full grace, saying, "I am the door, by me if *any man* enter in, he shall be saved," &c. But here He speaks thus to the Church. What a solemn position! How utterly fallen now! What ought to be the enjoyed portion of all the Church, whether in approaching God or in display before men, or in the communion of Christ,

proffered in pure grace to him who hearkens and humbles himself before the grace of the Lord. He was One that had no sympathy with their self-satisfaction. He stood outside, knocking at the door, if perchance there should be a heart within, not too much occupied with the things and the persons around, that would open to Him. To such He says, "I will come in to him and sup with him and he with me." But it is all individual. If we saw a complete departure, are we to say, "there is no hope?" Not at all; there is the Lord standing at the door and knocking. There may not be many to answer His call, but some will; and the promise is, "to him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me in my throne; even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."

It is a mistake to suppose that this is comparatively a glorious promise: we are apt to think so, because we naturally value display. But God does not estimate *power* the most. His holy love, proving itself divine most of all when Christ humbled Himself, in coming down to man and dying for him—that is the standard of value, rather than power or glory. He could make a thousand worlds with far more ease than He gave His Son to suffer. I do not question the grace of such a word, spite of such evil; but our sharing the kingdom with Christ is not the most blessed thing we shall enjoy. And the promise here does not go farther. What we have and shall have in Christ Himself is much more precious. Yet is this a portion with Christ. In John xvii. 23, the Lord shows that the display of glory is for the vindication of Himself before the world. All this disclosed glory in the future will be the proof

to the world, that they might know that the Father loves us as He loved His Son. But *we* are entitled to know it by the Holy Ghost *now*. We do not wait till then to know the love that has given us the glory—a deeper thing than the appearing to the world, or thrones in the kingdom. The personal affection of the Lord to His people is a better portion than anything displayed before men or angels.

Here the Lord closes the churches. He had got to the last phase. The wisdom of God has provided in these chapters not only His depth, but what requires conscience, rather than any great amount of intelligence to understand. What is needed is the eye fixed on Christ. Besides these epistles being a messenger to local churches in the name of St. John, we have seen in them a sketch of the whole history of the Church till the Lord comes. For properly speaking, not the Lord's addresses, but the churches themselves and their angels constitute "the things which *are*" (i.e., the actual state in John's day.) The addresses, while primarily connected with the facts then existing, go far beyond them, and reach out into a prolonged moral application, till there is no longer any recognized assembly, the last (though with mercy to individuals) having been summarily rejected as a public witness by the Lord. After that, we never hear of the churches any more upon the earth. On the contrary, the curtain drops, and we have a new scene altogether. The seer no longer turns round to see who spoke behind him on earth,* but hears the same voice above, whether he is

* The chief opponent of the future or rather protracted application of the Apocalyptic epistles, draws from the local direction of the voice that, according to a mode of interpretation then pre-

now invited to ascend. The government of the world from the throne in heaven, its accompaniments and consequences, are the things which follow, when the Church's time-state is closed. After this we have individual saints both among the twelve tribes of Israel and out of all nations mentioned as such, but this only makes the contrast more striking. Henceforward, if specified at all, they are named as Jews and Gentiles, because there was no longer any thing of the nature of the assembly of God upon earth: for the very meaning, and essence of the Church is, that there is neither Jew nor Gentile, because all are one in Christ.

In the detail of these seven epistles, there is also abundant practical instruction. It is true; that the Spirit addressed them to the churches; but "he that hath an ear" is expressly enjoined to give heed; and this, to the challenges of the Lord sent to them all. Such application, however, falls more fittingly within the domain of ordinary ministry in the word.

It may be well, now that we have gone over the ground of the Apocalyptic epistles, to notice the objections urged against the larger view of their meaning by

valent, the visions about to be shown would refer to events *yet future and behind*, in the course of time. (Horæ Apocalypticæ, 4th Edition, vol. i., pages 66, 67.) If there be any truth in that interpretation, it strongly confirms *the future bearing of the seven addresses*. But it is certain from Rev. iv. 1, that when the purely prophetic visions are about to begin, the speaker's voice is *above*, not behind. What the turning to the voice behind in ch. i. really shows is, that the prophet's eye was forward as it were, in the direction of the kingdom, and that he was recalled to take notice of the Churches, "the things which are," as justifying the Lord in His setting aside of Christendom, in order to the introduction of His kingdom in power, when patience shall no longer be demanded. For the Lord will create new heavens and a new earth: first, in a partial preparatory sense—the millennium; fully and then finally, the eternal state. The Church state is thus emphatically treated at present time.

Bp. Newton. "Many contend, and among them such learned men as More and Vitringa, that the seven epistles are prophetical of so many successive periods and states of the church, from the beginning to the conclusion of all. But it doth not appear that there are, or were to be, seven periods of the church, neither more nor less; and no two men can agree in assigning the same periods. There are, likewise, in these epistles, several innate characters which were peculiar to the church of that age, and cannot be so well applied to the church of any other age. Besides other arguments, there is also this plain reason; the last state of the church is described in this very book as the ~~most~~ glorious of all, but in the last state in these epistles, that of Laodicea, the church is represented as 'wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.'" (Newton's Works, Vol. I., p. 549, Ed. 1782.)

Now it is clear that "it doth not appear" is rather an assumption than a proof. *Why* does it not appear? Another might urge the same objection, and perhaps with quite as much weight, against the seven seals, trumpets, and vials. *God* has been pleased to specify in each of these instances seven salient points, so to speak, as His complete account of each. "The main subjects of this book," the Bishop had just before remarked, "are comprised of sevens, seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven vials; as seven was also a mystical number throughout the Old Testament." If this answer satisfy as to the seven vials, why not as to the seven epistles? Doubtless, more spirituality may be required for right discernment in the latter than in the former case; because one series

relates to *external judgments* in the world, whereas the other series takes cognizance of such remarkable *spiritual conditions*, good and bad, in the history of the church, as it seemed good to the Lord to notice. Hence *à priori* one might be prepared for a greater divergence of judgment among Christians in their adaptation of Rev. ii., iii., than in their views of any other parts of the book. If there had been, therefore, a considerable measure of truth in what he says, the general principle would still remain undisturbed. But this is not the case. There is a striking agreement as regards the first three or four churches. This, of course, is not urged as in the least degree authoritative, but as a sufficient answer to the charge of hopeless discrepancy preferred by Bp. Newton. Retort would be easy on the discordant schemes of interpreting the seals, trumpets, and vials.

It is singular, however, that the Bishop bears testimony in the next page to the mystical meaning of the epistle to Smyrna. For the "tribulation ten days" is there explained of the greatest persecution that the primitive church ever endured, Diocletian's persecution, which lasted ten years, and grievously afflicted all the Eastern churches. Conscious that such an application, not in the promises attached, but in the body of the epistle, is fatal to his own exclusively literal application, the Bishop thereon allows that the "promissory or threatening part foretells something of their future condition," and asserts that "in this sense, and in no other, can these epistles be said to be prophetic" (p. 550).

But how stop here, once you own, as he does in the

Smyranean epistle, a bearing beyond the bare single church in or near that age, once you extend its scope to all the East, and its date to the beginning of the fourth century? Indeed, that fierce persecution was not confined to the East; for all the empire, not excepting Spain and Britain, was stained with Christian blood. If the principle is true in one epistle, why not in all? And, in fact was not general declension within as clearly marked in Ephesus, as persecution from without in Smyrna? and does not Pergamos portray the corrupting influences of worldly exaltation, as palpably as Thyatira sets forth the proud unrelenting false prophetess of Popery?

No doubt, the unsatisfactory character attached by our Lord to Sardis must be painful and startling to those whose eye is filled with ordinary Protestantism, and its decent orthodoxy. And, perhaps, yet more distasteful is the sight of another and a subsequent testimony, which sets those who bear it in weakness and scorn outside the religious world, with the coming of Christ their blessed and animating hope.

But it is plain that the picture of the last assembly, in its deplorable lukewarmness, and the Lord's peremptory rejection of it, was the great difficulty to Bp. N., because of its inconsistency with his theory of the last state of the church, "described in this very book, as the most glorious of all." But this is a total mistake. The Revelation *never* describes the church on earth after Laodicea. The glorious description, to which the Bishop refers, is probably in Rev. xix.-xxi., where the entire church is glorified above. In a word, *this reason is plainly invalid.* The bride of the Lamb

is to reign, but this does not contradict the solemn testimony of the Laodicean epistle, that the last state of Christendom here below is to be, like that of Israel before it, "worse than the first." The general testimony of the New Testament entirely confirms the witness borne by this particular part, as appears from Luke xvii. 26-37; 2 Thess. ii. 1-12; 2 Tim. iii. 1-5; 2 Peter ii. iii.; 1 John ii. 18; Jude 11-19.





